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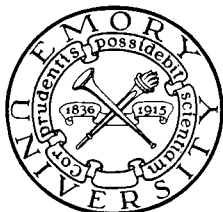
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TELEGRAPH SECRETS.

BY A STATION MASTER.

CONTENTS.

CHAP.	CHAP.
I.—CAUGHT AT LAST.	V.—WORKING THE NEEDLE.
II.—ODDS AGAINST THEM.	VI.—FORGING THE WILL.
III.—QUICKER THAN LIGHTNING.	VII.—A MURDERER AT LARGE.
IV.—THE CLANDESTINE BRIDAL.	VIII.—A RUN ON THE BANK.
IX.—A MISTIC MESSAGE.	

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TELEGRAPH SECRETS.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Author of the following Stories has been enabled, during a period of many years spent in the service of a widely-celebrated Telegraph Company, to collect a series of most romantic incidents, which are well worthy of perpetuation in print. For the facts themselves he makes no apology, but he trusts that the way in which he has wrapped them up in the form of narrative may be agreeable to that portion of the reading public who take an interest in those occurrences in real life which, by their very nature, are too strange not to be true.

I.—CAUGHT AT LAST.

DESMOND DE VIGNE was a well-known man. If he was not well known to the public, he made up for that deficiency in popularity by being notorious in police circles. In Scotland Yard was he known. His fame had even penetrated from the Dan of the West to the Beersheba of the East; his name was cherished amongst the annals of the police-court in Leman Street, Whitechapel. *Aliases* he had many, but Desmond De Vigne was his most cherished designation. There were people hardy enough to assert that his father had been honourably known as Jones in a small provincial town, had been christened Jones, and had been buried as Jones, with a tombstone and an epitaph as Jones; but this

patronymic was not nearly aristocratic enough for the unworthy son of a worthy father. He had introduced himself into polite circles as De Vere, and had been ignominiously expelled from a certain noble house as Norfolk Howard. For thirty years he had, in conventional phrase, "been about town," and during that quarter of a century he had victimized a few silly people who had more money than wit, and who fluttered moth-like around the flame of his consuming candle. Everyone who had the slightest acquaintance with Desmond De Vigne knew him to be a most finished blackguard and accomplished swindler, but so cleverly were his frauds upon society conducted that he invariably escaped punishment, if he were unable to escape detection and exposure. Let us sum up this man's character in a few words. He was thoroughly heartless; he would betray the best friend he had in the world for the paltry sum of five shillings, or possibly less; he was as subtle as a serpent; as treacherous as an Italian demoralized by the brutalizing reign of a bigoted Bourbon; as smiling and as clever as anyone who ever wore a mask; and was completely incapable of entertaining any real attachment to, or friendship for, anybody. Yet, paradoxical as it may seem, this man had a wife and a friend. The life of his wife, poor creature, was one perpetual martyrdom. Her history is to be summed up in a few words. She was the daughter of a gentleman whom Desmond De Vigne imagined to be possessed of great wealth. In the expectation of possessing some of her father's property, he laid siege to her heart, and carried the fragile citadel by storm. From the hour she became his wife she never knew what peace or happiness was. His friend was an Irishman of the name of Corny O'Byrne. This fellow was what the jackal is to the lion,—a toady, a follower in the wake of his principal's iniquity—an utterly despicable wretch, for whom hanging was too good, and penal servitude a mild invention of punitive genius.

Desmond De Vigne had lived very nearly everywhere. He was continually shifting his quarters, and the Trade Protection Societies were indignant at the versatility of his talent, which prevented them from putting their subscribers on their guard. If he levanted from one place as Hargrave, he would turn up at another as Grosvenor; and thus the little game, whose object was nothing more or less than plunder, went gaily on.

A few years ago, this most delectable associate for a young man just starting in life was domiciled at the pretty little village of Willesden, where he had his horses, his dogs, his friend, and his wife. I put his wife at the end of the list, because he cared less for her than he did for anything, and she, to her sorrow, knew it.

Myrtle House was a charming little retreat, standing back from the high road; the grounds were prettily laid out and neatly kept, which was not so very surprising, as Desmond De Vigne retained a gardener at a large salary for the express purpose of laying out

the grounds with taste, and making them attractive to the eye of any visitor he might feel inclined to invite from town.

The saddest feature about Myrtle House was Mrs. Desmond De Vigne, who walked through the parterres full of flowers with all the statuesque beauty of a Grecian damsel. Her face was generally expressionless, unless she thought of her father and her maiden home; then her cheeks flushed—those pale, marble-like cheeks—and her lustreless eyes became brimful of tears, which she was altogether unable to suppress.

One evening in the golden month of June—that blissful, happy month of roses—her husband came from London in his mail phaeton accompanied by a stranger. Familiar as Agnes was with her husband's friends, she did not remember to have seen the features of this individual before. He was young, handsome, and had a pleasing address. Corny O'Byrne, as a matter of course, accompanied his principal and patron; whenever there was dirty work on hand, Corny O'Byrne was not far off. He was the filthy vulture who feasted upon the carcass after the monarch of the feast had satiated his monarchical hunger, which, as with all oligarchical institutions, was comprehensive.

Sending the trap round to the stable, Desmond De Vigne ushered his young and aristocratic friend into his house. The strains of sweet music had been floating in the air before the vehicle arrived, but no sooner had the wheels of the phaeton grated upon the gravel than they were hushed as if by magic.

Mrs. De Vigne was in the drawing-room. It was just seven o'clock. She was becomingly attired in a white muslin dress cinctured by a blue sash; her hair was brushed smoothly over her forehead and collected in a knot behind—and oh! what lovely hair it was! a more love-inspiring auburn never was seen. The very simplicity of her attire made Agnes De Vigne more interesting than she would have been had she dressed herself more elaborately. A plaintive expression sat upon her features, which was inexpressibly attractive; and numbers of men who would not have cared about being seen in Piccadilly with Desmond De Vigne, did not mind coming to Willesden to dine, for the sake of beholding his beauteous wife, who obtained the *sobriquet* of the "Weeping Darling." Everyone pitied her, for they saw that she had not one taste in common with her husband. They saw she was a victim, and they saw that Desmond De Vigne was slowly killing his lovely flower by the everlasting frostiness of his manner.

It was strange—very strange, to see how passively she obeyed him; her mind seemed to be entirely subservient to his. No one ever heard a murmur escape her lips; no one heard her sigh; and yet no one ever passed five minutes in her society without discovering that she was intensely miserable.

Walking into the drawing-room with a jaunty air and independent carriage, Desmond De Vigne exclaimed, "My dear, allow

me to introduce my friend, Mr. Harry Marchmont, who has kindly consented to honour us with his company until to-morrow."

Mrs. De Vigne was sitting upon a sofa, and she bowed to Mr. Marchmont, extending her hand as he approached her.

"I trust I am not intruding, Mrs. De Vigne?" he exclaimed.

"Not at all," she replied; "any friend of my husband is always welcome."

"Come, that's amiable!" said Corny O'Byrne, in his habitual coarse manner.

Agnes De Vigne cast a scathing look upon him, which made his eyes seek the carpet. He knew what her wrath was when she was aroused, and he dreaded the explosion. If she had a vial of anger to pour forth upon anyone, Corny O'Byrne was always the recipient of it. She had sworn to love, honour, and obey her husband, and if she found that it was not in her human nature to love and honour him, she still adhered to the letter of the law to the best of her ability, and obeyed him. Yes, she obeyed him, when she knew that she was doing wrong. She was *particeps criminis* with her husband in many a nefarious concern, and yet she went on blindly laying up for herself the detestable wages of sin.

The stranger also cast a glance of scorn and despal upon O'Byrne, for whom it was easy to see that he had no liking.

"We have dined, dear Agnes," said Desmond De Vigne, with a parental rather than a marital air, "so we shall not tax the resources of your *cuisine* to-night; but there are, I believe, some shell-fish in the trap, about which we will thank you to give instructions to the cook."

"I will see that it is attended to," she answered.

"Before supper, we had better go on the lawn; it is a lovely evening, and a cigar accompanied by some iced hock will be anything but disagreeable. What say you, Marchmont?"

"By all means."

"Let us go, then."

"May we hope for the happiness of Mrs. De Vigne's society?"

Instead of replying, Agnes looked timidly at her husband, as if desirous of taking her cue from him. He saved her the trouble of replying.

"Oh, yes!" he exclaimed; "there is nothing my wife likes better than a saunter on the lawn."

"Are you not afraid of the dew, Mrs. De Vigne?" inquired Mr. Marchmont.

"Not in the least," she replied. "I am a country girl, and used to such things."

"Corny!" said De Vigne.

"Eh! did you speak to me?" replied O'Byrne.

"Yes. Just be good enough to go to the cellar, and see about some wine. By the way, Marchmont, do you care about hock, or would you prefer it adulterated with soda?"

"Oh no, thanks," replied Marchmont; "anything you are in the habit of drinking will please me."

"Have you no choice?"

"None in the least."

"*Eh bien!* most accommodating of mortals; hock let it be. Be particular about the ice, Corny. Wine, this weather, is unfit for drinking unless it is somewhat frigid."

De Vigne led the way to the lawn through an open window. Marchmont, walking by the side of Agnes, followed. He addressed several remarks to her, but she answered him in monosyllables.

De Vigne produced a case well filled with cigars; he handed it to Marchmont, who helped himself. In a short time Corny O'Byrne returned with a bottle of wine in each hand, followed by a servant, who carried a tray containing glasses and ice. Soon the little party became a merry one. Corny O'Byrne made his best jokes, which, although stereotyped and time-honoured, were, nevertheless, amusing to a neophyte like Harry Marchmont, who had only just commenced life. He was in the army, and a year before his father had been obliging enough to die—that was how De Vigne phrased it—and leave him a very large fortune, amounting to no less than seven thousand a-year. Desmond De Vigne told anecdotes as brilliant and sparkling as his wine, and Agnes alone was disconsolate and abstracted.

Finding that his wife was little better than an animated statue, De Vigne took advantage of an opportunity, and drew her away from Corny O'Byrne and Marchmont, who were eagerly discussing the probabilities of a coming race. When they had reached a safe distance, from whence their conversation could not be overheard, they halted.

"Agnes," exclaimed De Vigne, "why do you treat my friend so coldly? Do you not possess sufficient perception to know that I have brought him with a distinct purpose in view?"

"I do know it."

"Why?"

"Because you are a bird of prey——"

"A what?"

"And never do anything without an object," she continued, disregarding his interruption.

"Very well. Knowing that, do you not think that it is your bounden duty to assist me in every way in your power?"

"Am I ever to be your slave?" she said, with a weary sigh.

"My slave! Well, if to be my wife is to live a life of slavery, I suppose I must reply in the affirmative," he answered, carelessly.

"What do you want me to do?" Agnes demanded, a little fiercely. It seemed that her lamb-like manner was leaving her by degrees.

"I will tell you," said Desmond De Vigne, looking guardedly round him, to see that the coast was clear, and then concentrating his regards upon his beautiful wife.

"I am listening."

"I want you to be as fascinating to Marchmont as you possibly can."

"Why?"

"Because the fellow has money, and he is young. I have always found that young men part with their money more easily than old stagers. Marchmont is enormously rich, and you know how badly off we are for money."

"That's true enough," she replied, with a sigh of resignation.

"Is it wise," said Desmond De Vigne, "to neglect a magnificent chance like the one that presents itself, when all our bills here are falling due, and when it is absolutely essential to our preservation that we should have some funds with which to carry us on?"

Agnes hid her face in her hands, and tears trickled through her fingers.

"What now?" demanded her husband, harshly.

"This dreadful life is killing me."

"What dreadful life?"

"That which we are leading."

"Oh! for my part, I see nothing dreadful about it," answered Desmond De Vigne.

"Do we not live from hand to mouth?"

"Well, what then? Thousands of others do the same thing."

"Possibly, but in a more respectable manner."

"My dear Agnes," said Desmond De Vigne, calmly, "how often am I to impress upon you that we are all creatures of circumstances? That I am what I am, is a mere accident of birth and nothing more. I might have been a highly respectable member of society, instead of a bird of prey, as some one—I think yourself—has generously called me."

"That is sophistry."

"Nevertheless, it is to the point. I want money; Marchmont has what I want. It must flow from his pocket into mine, and you must assist in the conversion."

"In what way?" said Agnes De Vigne, in a stony voice.

"We shall play at whist after supper; you will be his partner."

"But I play whist well."

"You must play badly to-night; of course, you must pretend to have some practical knowledge of the game. You may run Corny and I close, but you must allow us to win every rubber, as the stakes will be high."

"It is nothing more or less than robbery."

"Tactics, my dear."

"I repeat, robbery."

"Tactics, my dear," said Desmond De Vigne. "I shall rely upon you after supper."

He walked back to the spot where O'Byrne and Marchmont were standing.

"Ah!" exclaimed Marchmont, gaily, "you are certainly a most eccentric host, and withal a cruel one. You not only leave me with this gentleman, but you deprive me of the delightful society of your charming wife."

Agnes blushed, but replied, "When my husband returns from town, he usually inflicts the petty details of his day's work upon me."

"Are you, then, his privy counsellor?"

Agnes shrugged her shoulders.

"There should always be confidence between husband and wife," remarked Corny O'Byrne, sententiously.

"Oh, quite so; I agree with you entirely there," cried Marchmont, with the generous enthusiasm of youth. "It is very sad when a husband cannot trust his wife, or *vice versa*."

"Suppose we adjourn to the house," said De Vigne. "The night air is becoming chilly, and Mrs. De Vigne is slightly susceptible to cold."

"Pray lead the way," replied Marchmont.

When they reached the house, they found supper prepared for them. That post-prandial meal passed off agreeably, and cards followed as naturally as soda and brandy after a debauch.

Mrs. De Vigne played her part in the organized conspiracy with evident reluctance; but she played it successfully, and that was all her husband required of her. At the end of the game, Marchmont was his debtor to the extent of several hundreds, and Agnes was Corny O'Byrne's debtor in a similar sum.

Afterwards, Agnes De Vigne sat down at the piano, and sang a plaintive melody, which Harry Marchmont thought the most delicious *morceau* he ever listened to.

"Your wife sings like a nightingale," he said to De Vigne.

"She warbles a little," answered De Vigne, carelessly, as if his wife's talent was a matter of perfect indifference to him.

The intercourse thus happily commenced between Marchmont and the De Vignes was fostered and encouraged by Desmond; he saw that the young man admired his wife, and he made her attract and play with him as a cat does with a mouse.

One day De Vigne sought his wife, and said, "Agnes!"

She turned her lustrous and expressive eyes full upon him interrogatively.

"I am about to put myself in your power."

"In mine! Do you not know that you are already in my power?" she answered, musically.

"Possibly; but we have hitherto rowed in the same boat. If I have been guilty of a misdemeanour or a crime, you have either passively or actively participated in it."

"Well, well," she said, impatiently; "make me the recipient of your confidence. The time has not yet come for me to be your Delilah."

"Not yet come! Could the time ever come?" demanded Desmond De Vigne, eyeing her suspiciously.

"I am no prophet, therefore I shall not vaticinate respecting the events of the future."

"Your mood is singular to-day. But listen: I have forged Marchmont's name to a bill of exchange. This bill will be due in a few days, and all will be discovered. The sum is a large one, and I fear that Marchmont will be much exasperated."

"What is the amount?"

"Three thousand pounds."

"Indeed! and what do you expect me to do?"

"I wish you to talk to Marchmont; blame me as much as you like, make me out a villain, but do it judiciously, and lead him to believe that I am seduced by evil example and bad companions; in a word, make him think me more sinned against than sinning."

Agnes bowed her head.

"Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly."

"And you will effect my preservation?"

"I will endeavour to do so," she replied. "When will Marchmont be here?"

"I expect him to-morrow. I shall go to town to-day with Corny, and give him an invitation to dinner."

Desmond De Vigne, satisfied with his interview, kissed his wife coldly on the forehead, and went away. There was nothing loving or affectionate in his icy manner; and as for Agnes, she was chiselled marble, and yet there was a fiery volcano in her heart, which raged furiously, although it did not burst into positive eruption.

When he was gone, she threw herself with a weary sigh into a *fauteuil*, and exclaimed wearily—oh! so wearily—with a heavy sigh: "He orders me about like a slave or a dog. He has not a kind word for me. He appreciates me only for the use I am to him. Would that I were dead! Will oblivion never come? He knows I do not love him, and can he wonder at it? No. He has made me what I am; he will make me what I shall be."

That night Desmond De Vigne, though he knew it not, was rushing on his fate. He came home with Corny O'Byrne intoxicated. Although he was accustomed to copious libations, he seldom committed the folly of becoming tipsy. It so happened, that on this particular occasion he overstepped the limits of prudence, and reeled into the house a drunken man, supported by Corny, who was little better.

Agnes shrank from him in abhorrence. If there is one thing which a modest and delicate woman detests more than another, it is a drunken man.

"Come here, Aggy," exclaimed Desmond De Vigne, in a hoarse voice.

"No," she answered sharply.

"No! but I say yes. I'm your master, and you must obey me. Come here, I say."

"I tell you I will not," she replied boldly.

Filled with vinous obstinacy, Desmond continued to insist upon her approaching him; she as steadily resisted his imperative commands.

"I shall leave you with your friend," she said. "To-morrow, when you have slept off the effect of your potations, I will talk to you, but not before."

"Come here. I wish to look at your pretty face," shouted Desmond De Vigne.

She stood erect, with flashing eyes.

"Ah! stand still—that is a becoming attitude. I admire you when you are statuesque."

He regarded her as he would have regarded Gibson's Venus, or any other work of art.

With a contemptuous glance she turned round, and was about to leave the room.

"Stop her, Corny! stop her!" cried Desmond De Vigne.

Corny ran to the door, and placed his back against it.

"Allow me to pass, if you please," said Agnes, with flashing eyes.

"Can't; it's against the governor's orders," replied Corny, flourishing his hand menacingly.

Turning to her husband, Agnes said, "Is it your wish that I should be subjected to such an outrage as this?"

"Come here, Aggy," he answered, reverting to his original proposition; "I want you."

She pressed her hand to her palpitating breast, as if to stay the violent beating of her heart.

"You won't obey me!" continued Desmond De Vigne, staggering to his feet, and advancing towards her; "then we must see what is to be done with you."

It is an old saying, that when the gods wish to destroy anyone, they first of all drive them mad. Assuredly Desmond De Vigne was hovering on the confines of insanity when he did that which he ever afterwards repented. Advancing towards his wife, who did not flinch from his threatening demeanour, he raised his coward fist, and struck her heavily in the face. She reeled against the wall, stunned by the force of the blow. Corny, trembling with apprehension for the consequences of this rash act, supported her in his arms.

"There!" said De Vigne, with a wild laugh, "that will show that I am master, and that I will be obeyed by all who live under my roof."

"Hush!" said Corny, holding up his hand, as if to deprecate any further conversation, or any remarks which might arouse Agnes's slumbering ire.

"Open the door, and let her go to her apartments," continued Desmond, disregarding his friend's advice. "She shall not stay here."

Corny opened the door, and gently pushed Agnes into the passage, which was faintly lighted by an old-fashioned oil lamp. The door slammed behind her, and she heard her husband giving vent to curses and imprecations which would have disgraced a costermonger or a coalheaver. She gasped for breath, and leant against a table which stood near the wall.

"Oh! this is too much, too much!" she murmured. "I have borne with him too long. Now that he has once so far forgotten himself as to strike me, my existence will be ten thousand times more miserable than it was before. I must go. This is no longer a home for me."

Taking a white cambric handkerchief from her pocket, she wiped her lips, which were copiously stained with blood, she then ascended to her bedroom. She dressed herself, and placed a purse containing gold in her hand, and thus provided, stole softly from the house. The night was fine; the stars shone brilliantly, and she walked with ease to the nearest inn, where she experienced no difficulty in procuring a fly to take her to London.

What was her motive in seeking the great metropolis? She scarcely knew. Her mind was in a state of chaos; her chief object was to escape from the brutality and illtreatment of her callous husband, who, by his conduct that night, had completely alienated the last spark of affection which had, through much misery and wretchedness, lingered in her forlorn heart.

She reached London, and dismissing the fly, walked along the streets until she came to a hotel, at which she obtained apartments. With her eyes red and swollen with weeping, she sank into an uneasy slumber. When morning came, she felt seriously unwell, and the people who attended upon her thought it their bounden duty to send for a doctor. The medical man arrived, and pronounced her to be in an incipient stage of a virulent fever. It was with the utmost chagrin that she heard the fact, but she was too weak and ill to say a word to any of those about her. In this condition she remained two days, after that she became delirious; on the fourth day she raved incoherently; she repeatedly said, "I must save him!—save him! The forgery will be discovered; let me save him!" These words had no particular significance to the people by whom she was surrounded, they supposed them to be the offspring of a diseased imagination.

In the meantime, Desmond De Vigne was in despair; he would have given worlds to have discovered the whereabouts of his ill-used wife, and could the past have been recalled, what would he not have given to recall it? He knew that she alone could save him, and she was nowhere to be found. He waited until the eve of the day upon which the bill would be presented, and a discovery

of his crime inevitable,—waited feverishly, anxiously, hoping against hope, and trusting that she would at the last minute present herself. Finding that such was not the case, he prepared for flight, and took Corny into his confidence.

"Look here, O'Byrne," he exclaimed, "my wife has left me. I do not know whether her desertion presages the beginning of the end, but this I know, I must fly from London for a time. I feel positive that Agnes could have done what she liked with Marchmont, and he would cheerfully have made me a present of the three thousand pounds to which I helped myself. To-night I start for Scotland; will you accompany me?"

"No," answered Corny, shortly.

"You will not! Do I rightly hear and understand you?" said Desmond De Vigne, open-mouthed with astonishment. The defection of his coadjutor had never entered his head until that moment.

"I can be of no use to you in your involuntary exile," said Corny, "and I have my own affairs in London to attend to."

"Give me your companionship. I have money."

"So have I, for the matter of that. No, no; I would rather not go with you. If you should get into trouble over this bill affair, I too might be compromised, which would be unfair, as I had nothing to do with it."

"You participated in the profits."

"Did I? Perhaps so. My memory is so bad that I cannot recollect whether I did or not; however, I will take your word for it."

Desmond De Vigne looked angrily at his once servile dependant, who now showed himself in his true colours, and appeared inclined to speak; but changing his mind, he turned upon his heel and disappeared.

The next day the forgery was discovered, and Henry Marchmont could scarcely believe that he had been so grossly imposed upon. Finding that no effort was made to conciliate him, and being enraged at the black and base ingratitude with which he was treated, he determined to prosecute the delinquent. When he came to this resolution, the plaintive face of Agnes De Vigne—sweet, lovely, long-suffering Agnes De Vigne—rose up before him and his wrath. Mollified by the beauteous vision, he drove down to Willesden, inclined to make a compromise; but he found the house shut up and the place deserted.

When this fact was patent, his rage obtained the mastery once more, and he resolved to issue a warrant immediately. On arriving at his house, he found Corny O'Byrne waiting for him, and demanded his business.

"I have reason to believe," said Corny, impudently, "that you have been badly treated by my acquaintance, Desmond De Vigne."

"Infamously treated!"

"Do you wish to know where he is to be found?"

"I do," replied Marchmont, "for I have made up my mind to punish him for his bad conduct."

"That is nothing; you don't know him as I do," said Corny, with a smile; "but come, tell me what you will give me for my secret? I will sell Desmond De Vigne to you for a certain sum."

"Name it."

"A hundred pounds!"

"Oh, friendship!" said Marchmont, indignantly, "how art thou prostituted by such a fellow as this! Why, my good man, you were De Vigne's inseparable companion, his bosom friend; you were with him night and day, and yet you talk of selling him! Oh, monstrous!"

"That does not matter to you," returned Corny; "you want the man, and you'll never find him without my aid. Is it a bargain, or is it not?"

Marchmont sat down at the table, and wrote a cheque for a hundred pounds. "Take it," he said; "go to Scotland Yard and give information to the police; it is well that you should finish your dirty work."

Corny grinned, and with a bow departed. The police were informed that the delinquent had gone north, and they immediately proceeded on his track. The telegraph was put in operation, and I transmitted the message which led to Desmond De Vigne's ultimate capture. It was this:—"Left London, Euston Square, by the 8.30 express, booked for Edinburgh, a tall, handsome, dark man, hair on face, well dressed; luggage, one portmanteau and carpet-bag, with initials D. De V painted white; expression rather careworn; has scar over right eyebrow; great smoker. Wanted for forgery. Arrest and hold until Markham of the A reserve arrives with Detective Homersham."

This telegram was sent to Carlisle, and when the train ran hissing and panting into the station, Desmond De Vigne stepped on the platform with his carpet-bag in his hand. The next minute handcuffs encircled his wrists, and he was a prisoner. When tried in London, he was found guilty, and received a sentence of twenty years' penal servitude, so that society was rid of a dangerous pest for a long period.

And what of his wife? A merciful Providence saw fit to release her from the woes of her earthly pilgrimage; she gradually sank and died, and her husband's disgraceful fate never reached her ears; and now, instead of weeping as a daughter of earth, perhaps she hymns praises in angelic form, and is radiant in the glorious splendour of the eternal world.

II.—ODDS AGAINST THEM.

A FINE old building was Bramly Hall, but one which could not claim for itself any distinctive features or peculiarities in a kingdom notoriously rich in noble edifices and ancestral domains. Tacked on to the mansion itself was a large estate, consisting of a couple of thousand acres of land, which once brought in to the owner of the property an income of over four thousand a-year. But Bramly Hall belonged to Edward Arden no longer; it was in the hands of mortgagees, who were hungering after the recovery of their principal, and had given notice of foreclosure. He had long been in difficulties, and struggling in a sea of misfortune had embittered his soul; the briny waves had entered at every pore, and Edward Arden, from being a fine, high-spirited gentleman, was a poor creature with a broken heart. The last ounce which was to break the camel's back was the sale of Bramly. Notice was given that the furniture and effects situate and being in Bramly would be sold on a certain day by a celebrated London auctioneer, with whose memory is associated all that is classic and ingenious in the way of redundant advertisements.

Mr. Arden had two sons. The eldest, Stanley, was twenty years old; the other, Philip, a year younger than his brother. They were both Winchester boys, and had not left the halls of William of Wykeham very long. Their mother had been dead some years. They were both good-looking, manly fellows, these young Ardens, and you could see by looking at them that they came of a good old stock.

Bramly Hall was situated about a mile from the high road which divided two counties in the heart of England, celebrated for their shady lanes and level country, the delight of lovers and the paradise of fox-hunters. This road was called the Watling-street Road, and on one side of it was the celebrated Beddington Wood, an infallible cover; a fox could always be found there, if there was not another within ten miles; but in the desperation caused by his pecuniary necessities, Mr. Arden had been obliged to sell the timber, which was soon to be cut down. This act of desecration and of vandalism raised an indignant outcry through the country; but a man can do what he likes with his own. Mr. Arden reasoned in this way: if he followed his own inclination, not one bough should be lopped off, not a single twig broken; but he could not leave his boys penniless. He was assured by his man of business that the timber in Beddington Wood was worth a large sum; from their antiquity, their trunks were of large girth. Then the stumps could be grubbed up, and the land

prepared for farming purposes; the soil was virgin, and would produce fifty or a hundredfold. This would be a source of income of full three hundred a-year.

Mr. Arden and his sons, driven from their home by the auctioneer, were staying at the Arden Arms, at Dunuton, a town three miles from Bramly—a smoky, dirty, out-of-the-way place, which the railway had done nothing for. Progress came, as it always does, in the wake of the iron horse, but not liking the look or the savour of Dunuton, it turned aside, and went further up the valley of the Trent. Stocking-making and ribbon-weaving were said to be the usual occupations of a people who by no stretch of the imagination could be called enterprising. The current of their lives was something like that of a sluggish mud-stream flowing through the town, which they dignified with the name of river; perhaps because it resembled the Thames near London in one respect—it was perpetually breeding malarias, emitting evil smells, and disseminating bad odours.

The inhabitants of Dunuton had a sleepy look, such as over-much beef and beer would produce, for they were potent at potting. No great man had ever sprung from amongst them, nor could they boast of a single instance of anyone of their number, either past or present, having distinguished or raised himself to a position by his own exertions. It was the birthplace and residence of mediocrity. There was only one man amongst them who had his wits about him, and that was the attorney of the place. But Fewes was a villain, and robbed the poor; so when he wrung any money from his victims, his speculations turned out ill, and it all withered away like the gold-pieces of the enchanter, which were metamorphosed into leaves, dry and crisp and useless. Fewes was sleek and fat and clean-shaven. He had made himself a churchwarden, but he was not very successful in his new character; he was unable to summon up the look of long-suffering and mortification of the flesh which he tried to affect, and his mock sanctimoniousness was so great a failure that it exposed him to well-merited ridicule; his voice was naturally sepulchral, and sounded like that of a sexton at the bottom of a grave speaking to his assistant grave-digger standing on the soil of the churchyard. The unimaginative Dunutonians always woke up when Fewes was mentioned. They all regarded him with unspeakable aversion, as an extortioner, an usurer, and a man who would not waste five minutes in friendly conversation with you unless he had his hand in your pocket. He was such an incarnation of legal iniquity, that once, at a meeting of spiritualists, the tables would not move and the spirits refused to speak while he was present. This story circulated through the county amongst others to his discredit, and the common people who had before held him in aversion shrank from him now as from one who carried a pestilence about with him.

Fewes was Mr. Arden's solicitor, and he strongly urged him to consent to the destruction of Beddington Wood. Perhaps he saw his way to some speculation. It is not to be supposed for a moment that his advice was disinterested. A farmer had once sent him a small hamper of mangold-wurzels, asking him his opinion of them. Fewes kept the mangolds, and gave them to his cow, at the same time sending the farmer a letter requesting the remittance of six-and-eightpence, for advising as to the excellence and condition of certain esculents, to wit, mangold-wurzels, with three-and-sixpence incidental charges.

The party at the Arden Arms was not a very cheerful one. Mr. Arden sat in an arm-chair, with his chin resting upon his hands. It was a lovely summer evening; the air penetrated through the open window rather less hot and sultry than it had been during the day. Stanley and Philip were playing backgammon together; they took little interest in the game, but it was necessary to do something. Stanley was smoking; Philip was averse to tobacco, and had never addicted himself to fashionable vices. In person he was stout and thick-set, with a frank, open face, while his brother was tall and slender, with a feminine cast of countenance, which his hair parted nearly in the middle heightened considerably. At intervals he applied himself to a tankard of beer which stood by his side, showing that he was fond of malt liquor.

The secret of their father's losses was well known to the boys. Henry Serpentine, a relation of their mother's, had inveigled him into speculations on the Stock Exchange. They were unsuccessful. As long as Mr. Arden had money, Serpentine clung to him; but when he was ruined he cast him off, and gathering together as much as he could from the wreck, left him in the lurch with heavy liabilities upon his already overburdened shoulders. No one knew exactly where Henry Serpentine had gone. It was his interest to conceal his destination, but rumour had it that Naples was the harbour of refuge where he intended to luxuriate upon what ill-gotten gains he had been able to scrape together. Neither Stanley or Philip said much about it to one another, but both registered a vow that a day of reckoning should come for Henry Serpentine.

Mr. Arden was a man upon the verge of seventy; he had lived for thirty years at Bramly, and it was hard to be turned out of doors in his old age. He hardly knew whether he would have a roof to shelter him and his boys until his agents brought in their accounts. The estate had been in the family for many years, but he had gone abroad in the pursuit of fortune. At the bar he had obtained money and distinction; he might have climbed to the topmost branches of the tree, had not his father's death called him back to England.

The silence was gloomy and melancholy in that sitting-room at

the Arden Arms. How could it be otherwise?—Bramly was to be sold the next day under peculiarly distressing circumstances. Perhaps Stanley would say, "Tray-deuce—a good throw!" or Philip would exclaim, "Sixes—that's better; cinq-ace—just lands me, sir."

A knock at the door roused them all—the old man from his meditations, the young ones from their game. Mr. Arden uttered a feeble "Come in." He had a faint suspicion that he knew who his visitor was, and he would rather have been without his company just then. The low voice in which he spoke was apparently unheard outside, for the first knock was succeeded by another. The stentorian tones of Philip were put in requisition, and Fewes, the Dunuton attorney, entered. The boys gave him a sullen sort of nod, and continued playing. Mr. Arden held out his hand, which was silently pressed in the cold, damp, limp fist of the attorney.

"Sit down, Mr. Fewes," said the old gentleman, "and be good enough to go through your business as briefly as you can. I am not very well to-night. Indeed, I would much rather postpone our conversation, if you can make it convenient do so."

Mr. Fewes, with a smile at once sickly and cynical, replied that he regretted his inability to do so; the matter pressed very much. It was about Beddington Wood that he wished to see him. If he would arrange finally about it, the affair could be settled out of hand, whilst Mr. Bobbins was in the country. He quite concurred with Mr. Arden in admitting that it was a pity to cut down so much fine timber, but he was going to leave the county, so what did it matter? Those who hunted the Arrowstone hounds had not treated him with such marked kindness as to necessitate his throwing away a chance. What good was the Wood to him in its present state? Simply none at all. Would Lord Furzon, the master of the hounds, rent it of him for four or five hundred a-year? Certainly not; he had been asked to do so, and he had refused. The Wood, as it stood, was not worth a penny-piece; but cut it down, sell the timber, and plough it up, it would be a source of income in perpetuity. As for the fox-hunters, laugh at them, snap his fingers at them. Let the Arrowstone hounds meet as usual at the Red Gate, and draw Bramly Wood or Bramly Gorse; the cover for vulpine creatures was just as good. It was all nonsense for a man to be so blind to his own interests, and as Mr. Arden's legal adviser, he could not stand by and see it.

"Cut the Wood down, sir," concluded Mr. Fewes; "no half measures. You have these young gentlemen to provide for; they are young, and without professions; they want help and assistance."

The attorney would not have given either of them sixpence to save them from starving in the street; but he simulated an interest in these young gentlemen because it suited his purpose,

and was likely to prove a cogent argument with the old man. Mr. Fewes would have the management of the sale of the Wood; in fact, it would be plucking the last feathers from the back of the pigeon who was already nearly bare.

Mr. Arden did not like to cut down Beddington; he knew what the people would say about him, and it was galling to him to think that things had come to such a pass, that he could not manage to exist without aiming a blow at every landowner near him who took an interest in fox-hunting. He had a perfect right to destroy and annihilate Beddington; but he entertained gentlemanly and high-minded scruples about the matter, which, while they did him infinite credit, caused him the most profound embarrassment. Béranger says, that every man is his own devil, and that we are the architects of our own hells. Mr. Arden had so cleverly constructed his place of torment, that he was tortured almost beyond the power of endurance.

Stanley, although continuing to play backgammon, listened attentively to the dialogue between his father and the attorney. When he heard Mr. Fewes talk about providing for himself and his brother, he exclaimed, "There is not so much occasion for that, Mr. Fewes, as you seem to think. I dare say my brother and myself can manage for ourselves."

"Confidence is peculiar to youth," observed Mr. Fewes, sententiously; and without taking any further notice of Stanley, continued his remarks about the Wood. But Stanley was not inclined to be choked off like a dog by a keeper; he had obtained what he considered the right scent, and he clung to it with the tenacity of a thoroughbred. He was determined that Beddington should not be sacrificed if he could help it. "If we are to leave the county," he thought, "let us do it with our hands as clean as possible; I should like our name to be mentioned respectfully when we are far away. Perhaps we may go abroad, but you are always meeting some one you know; it would not be nice to come in contact with a man from the same county, who, struck with your name, would say, 'That's the son of the man who cut down Beddington Wood.' Besides that, I have a liking for the Wood. I picked cowslips and primroses there when I was hardly as high as a retriever; I have hunted there, and killed woodcocks there."

He asked his brother to excuse him for a moment—he was obliged to interrupt the game, as he wished to speak to his father. Drawing his chair close to the fireplace, he assumed a business attitude, which he could do very well when he chose, and in a clear voice and forcible, well-selected language, exclaimed, "We cannot help selling Bramly, but if you think of cutting down the Wood to get money for Phil and myself, I ask you not to do it. For my part, I would not touch a halfpenny so obtained; I should look upon it as if it had been obtained by some sacrilegious act almost as bad as robbing a church. Why, that Wood must have

been in existence when William the Norman came over to England. I saw Furzon a few days ago, and he asked me to come and stay a few weeks at his place; but I should not like to show my face anywhere if the Wood is to be cut down. It is such a confession of abject poverty. Just be guided by me for once, will you? If you had not listened to others so much, we should not have been in so painful and perplexing a position."

Mr. Fewes saw that this address was taking the wished-for effect upon the old man, who was so tottery that he caught hold of the first set of leading-strings that was thrown out to him; so with a stern look he said—"Is that remark intended to apply to me? because if it is, I should feel obliged by your confining yourself to the question at issue. Personal remarks are always to be deprecated."

"If you think so, you are at liberty to do so," replied Stanley Arden, with a perceptible sneer.

The attorney, finding that the young man was not to be brow-beaten, changed his tactics, and observed, "There is an old saying in my part of the world, that beggars should not be choosers."

"In this case," responded Stanley, while the hot blood rushed up to and flushed his cheeks, "they will be. And look here, Mr. Fewes, I only pardon the coarseness and vulgarity of that remark, because I know from whom it comes. But if you forget that you are talking to a gentleman, and one in misfortune, after this reminder of the fact, I shall see if I cannot teach you better manners."

"Don't lose your temper, Stanley," said his father, with an impression that he was throwing oil upon the waters whose surface was troubled.

"How can I help it?" replied Stanley; "I can't sit here and be insulted by—— But never mind," he added, cooling down a little, "I will confine myself to the subject we were talking about. Promise me, and let Mr. Fewes thoroughly understand, that you will not sell Beddington. If you wish to get rid of it, I'll be bound we can dispose of it by private contract. If Furzon won't buy it, I know some one who will."

"The lad talks sensibly," said Mr. Arden, as if to himself "well, Stanley, you have my promise. So that matter drops Mr. Fewes."

"In that case, sir," said Mr. Fewes, "I have nothing else to confer with you about. I shall have the pleasure of seeing you to-morrow, after the sale."

Casting a scowling glance full of malignity upon Stanley, the attorney left the room, without making a parting obeisance, as was his usual habit.

Stanley was doubly pleased; he was glad that he had carried his point, and rejoiced at his victory over the attorney, who was a man towards whom he entertained the greatest possible aversion.

"These things worry me very much, Stanley," said the old man. "I wish it was all over, my boy; if it were not for your sakes, I should wish it over with myself too. I have lived too long; I ought to have died ten years ago."

"Those are things over which we have no control," replied Stanley.

"Ah! it's all very well for you to talk. I've lived too long, and I know it."

Rising from his chair, Mr. Edward Arden took up a lighted candle. It was too much to expect that gas had as yet arrived at Dunuton, or was likely to for another hundred years to come. Saying good-night in a depressed tone of voice, he walked heavily from the room, and sought his bed—that refuge for the unhappy, where a brief surcease from sorrow is granted by a Beneficent Genius. The brothers remained together in earnest confabulation. Philip quite approved of the attitude Stanley had adopted on the question of the Wood. They both expressed their willingness to go forth barefoot and fight the battle of life, in which they did not doubt they would be successful. They indulged in golden visions, and fancied themselves at the head of any profession they might take a liking to. Oh, youth! Why are we not always young?

The reason that misfortunes are so crushing is, that they are generally so fond of one another as to pay you a visit in a solid, compact phalanx, the onslaught of which is altogether irresistible. They exemplify the fable of the bundle of sticks: singly they are contemptible, and easily conquered; but advancing arm-in-arm, like a squadron of horse, like a tidal wave, like a whirlwind or a fierce tornado, your poor house is soon shattered and levelled about your ears, and you find out when it is too late that you have been building on a sandy foundation, which was all very well until the winds blew and the floods came, but when they did, the result was desolation.

On the day on which the sale was to take place, the road leading to Bramly Hall presented an animated appearance; gigs, carts, carriages of all sorts and descriptions, rolled along the avenue and into the domain appertaining. The red deer pricked up their ears at what they thought an unjustifiable interference with their privileges; they imagined that they had a prescriptive right to silence and solitude, which ought not to be rudely broken by plebeian vehicles or second-rate equipages. Stanley Arden and his brother Philip agreed to walk over from Dunuton. They wished to see the Hall once more; it possessed an irresistible fascination for them. Avoiding the main road, they took a by-path well known to them, which cut off at least a mile, and had the merit of being quiet and secluded as well as short. Mr. Arden was not aware of their intention, or perhaps he would have dissuaded them from it. He remained at the inn, making calculations of what this ought to fetch, and what the actual market

value of that was; for the auctioneer had forwarded him a copy of the catalogue of what were lately his chattels and effects. It was glorious July weather, and the sun streamed in upon the old man, and threw a bright and pretty halo about his head; but he did not look up, he was too intent on his work, thinking how much there would be for the boys when all was over. There was a billiard-table, which he had given Thurston a hundred and twenty guineas for; he put that down at half-price; it was almost as good as new, and upwards of a score of cues went with it. He thought the bidders would not depreciate it below half its cost price. He knew very little about the vicissitudes of property and the chances of sales; that billiard-table brought twelve guineas—the slabs of slate were worth double the money. There was a statue of a faun playing a tambourine with one of its fore feet, beautifully executed by Thorwaldsen, which cost seventy pounds; it sold for ten. Mr. Arden imagined that a large surplus would be handed over to him by the generous auctioneer; but then—poor, simple-minded gentleman!—he was not aware of the practice by which an organized band of bidders get everything at their own prices.

The young men were angry and annoyed as they approached Bramly; it hurt their pride to think that people of whom they knew nothing, and who were nobodies, should run riot all over the place, and be allowed to bid for articles of furniture which were endeared to their original possessors by long years of pleasant associations. They were rudely jostled as they walked up the stone steps and stood under the portico. A crowd of rough-looking fellows, who were probably agents for men who had money, and who were always on the look-out to pick up anything that might be cheap or a bargain, were standing on the lawn, laughing, talking, and swearing, treading over the beds and trampling the flowers under foot. Here lay a standard rose-tree, broken from its stem and trodden remorselessly under foot; a little further off was a bower of white French roses covered with sweet-pea bushes in bloom, fragrant and pleasant to look upon: some men were amusing themselves by plucking the flowers and throwing them at one another. This afforded them intense enjoyment, if one may judge from the boisterous merriment it created, and to which they gave vent with many a hoarse guffaw. The front door was wide open, and the morning-room, in which the sale was to begin, was crowded by those anxious to bid. Stanley recognized a few faces, but he avoided them; it was a moment of supreme misery to him, and he wished he had not been so rash as to seek it. The work of spoliation was inevitable; why, then, was he there? To prevent?—that he was powerless to do. To resist?—certainly he was passively aiding and abetting the spoilers in a negative manner, and sanctioning the unholy work by his presence. Accompanied by his brother, Stanley retreated, leaving

the Hall and its busy occupants. To him the Hall was like a carcase, and the men attracted there were nothing better than vultures and foul birds of prey.

They walked down towards the fish-ponds, moody and meditative. Suddenly Stanley exclaimed—"Come to the stables; the horses are not sold yet, they are kept to the last, I think."

The hint was sufficient for Philip; he cordially acquiesced in his brother's proposition, and hastily retracing their steps, they entered the courtyard in which the long range of stables was situated. There were some grooms hanging about, who touched their caps respectfully at seeing the young Ardens. One of them exclaimed to Stanley, "Come to say good-bye to the mare, sir?" Stanley nodded his head, and walked into the stable, followed by the groom. A handsome black mare in the first loose box pricked up her ears when her master entered. She had been Stanley's favourite, and he rode her on all occasions when speed and endurance were necessary. One night, Philip was taken suddenly ill, and it was obvious to everyone that a doctor should be immediately sent for. Stanley was so much attached to his brother, that he would allow no one but himself to be the messenger to fetch the medical aid that was required. He went down to the stable himself, put the trappings on the mare, and rode her across country by the light of the moon, reaching Dunuton in a little over a quarter of an hour.

Stanley turned to the groom, and said, "Saddle the mare, Griffin."

The man hesitated.

"Well, what's the matter with you? Can't you do as I told you?" cried Stanley, impetuously.

"There is the sale, sir, and——"

"Never mind that, lay the blame on me. Bring the saddle, I'll put the bridle on."

Griffin went away grumbling; he thought the horse would not sell so well after a "pipe-opener" as she would in her present state; but his late master seemed to have set his heart upon a ride, and he knew him well enough to understand that he would not allow himself to be thwarted. Stanley soon had the bridle between the mare's teeth; he threw the curb on the ground, saying, "I'll ride her without, to-day." Griffin led her out of the stable, and as he did so the clatter of hoofs was heard on the other side. Philip, divining his brother's intention, had caparisoned his favourite horse, Wildfire, and was already mounted. With a clean spring Stanley sprang into the saddle, and walked up the yard. The stablemen looked on half-deprecatingly, half-applaudingly; they knew not whether they were doing right or wrong in permitting the egression of the cattle at such a time; but Stanley had been so long their master, that they were accustomed to obey each and every of his instructions.

As the brothers, with exultant looks, were emerging from the yard, amidst the looks and remarks of the curious, Griffin ran after them. "Beg your pardon, Mr. Stanley," he said, "but the Arrowstone meet at the Gate to-day."

Stanley took out his watch. "Half-past eleven," he said; "what do they draw?"

"Draw the Wood, sir."

Stanley gave the man half-a-sovereign, and after speaking to Philip, urged on his horse, and cantered down the avenue in the direction of the main road. They had hardly reached the bottom of the park before an unusual commotion fell upon their ears. Looking up, Stanley perceived the red body of a fox stealing along in the direction of Bramly Gorse. It was clear that the dogs had had an early find, and were now in pursuit of Reynard. The brothers drew back under the shelter of some trees, so as not to interfere with or head the fox. The animal seemed unconscious or oblivious of their presence, and maintained his way with steady and unswerving celerity. Presently the dogs appeared in view, with their tails erect and their heads bent down upon the trail. Several horsemen followed, but as they had encountered some stiff fences on their way, their number was not so great as it otherwise would have been. Stanley waited until all but the outsiders had passed, and then he joined in the chase, Philip keeping up with him. The faces of the young men began to glow with the exercise and excitement. Lord Furzon was passed by them, and he waved his hand in a kindly manner. Stanley returned the salutation, but the pace they were going at was too great to permit of conversation. A formidable hedge lay before them, and some of the more prudent riders galloped down to the gate, which was held open for them by an obliging rustic. Stanley had gone over the fence before, and he did not hesitate now. Encouraging his horse by his voice, he gave him his head, and after being poised an instant in the air, he had the satisfaction of seeing himself safely landed on the other side. He went on a few paces, so as to be out of the way of anyone else who might have chosen the same part of the hedge, and then turned round to look after Philip. While resting with his hand on the crupper, the mare gave a shiver, as if startled by something. Stanley looked around, and his eyes lighted upon an old woman who had been seated on the bank. She held a quantity of wild flowers in her hand, among which the deep-coloured and graceful bluebell was conspicuous. She was attired like a gipsy. She had risen from her position, and approached Stanley, as if with the intention of speaking to him. Had it not been for his anxiety to know where Philip was, he would have ridden on, for he was falling lamentably into the ruck. As it happened, Philip had gone round by the gate, as he thought the hedge rather more than the horse he rode could manage.

"I know you, Stanley Arden!" cried the woman, in a cracked, shrill voice; "I know you, though you may not know me."

As he gazed at her, he remembered having seen her before; she was known amongst the people on the estate as Barbara. No one knew much about her; she was always on the tramp, and, it was said, received a few shillings a week from Mr. Fewes, the attorney of Dunuton. Whether he gave it her out of his own pocket, or whether he was commissioned by one of his clients to do so, was a fair subject for rumour, gossip, or speculation. Of course Barbara was supposed to possess the attributes of a witch, more or less; but as she was very harmless and gentle in her manner, she often received a kind word when others of her class would have been repulsed with an oath and a threat. Perhaps one circumstance which conduced to this toleration more than anything else was, that she was scrupulously honest, she had never been known to maraud or thieve ever since she made her appearance in Bramly more than twenty years ago.

When she spoke to him, Stanley was not in the mood for idle chatter with a trespassing vagrant; and desparing of seeing his brother, who he supposed must have crossed somewhere else, and was by this time in the adjoining field with the hounds, he was about to give the mare the rein, when Barbara, with a more agile spring than the casual observer would have thought she was capable of, seized the bridle and exclaimed, "We two must talk before we part. You are turned out to-day, Stanley Arden, root and branch, but the root will soon wither, and nothing but the branches will remain. Bramly's gone from you, and passed into the hands of strangers."

"Not for ever, mother, I hope," cried Stanley, good-naturedly, although he was inwardly chafing with impatience. "Come," he added, "let go the horse; I shall be left behind else."

"Not till we've done talking," she returned decisively.

"Don't be foolish" exclaimed Stanley; "leave the horse alone, or I'll ride over you."

She refused, and grinned at him with all the hideousness of insane obstinacy. Leaning over his horse's neck, he caught her arm, and compelled her by main force to leave go her hold upon the bridle. He sent her back with a jerk which sent her tottering into the hedge. Instantly collecting herself, and before he could get without the diapason of her voice, she cried in harsher accents than usual, "A bad day's work for you, Stanley Arden! I put a curse upon you! Do you hear me?—a curse! mark me well—a withering, scathing curse!"

Striking his horse with his open palm upon the neck—for he had no riding-whip—he urged him to his full speed; but he went away from the spot with the weird malediction of the old woman ringing unpleasantly in his ears. When he had half traversed the meadow he looked back, and saw her standing in the place where

he had left her, with her form erect and rigid, her arm extended, and her lips parted, as if she were repeating the words, "I put a curse upon you, Stanley Arden!"

Laughing at his superstitious feeling, which had at first made him regret his violence to the old hag, he pressed on, and overtook his brother, who was waiting at the nearest gate for him. In spite of himself, Stanley felt oppressed; he could not shake off the idea that something was about to happen, the consequences of which anticipated event would prove unpleasant and disastrous to himself and his brother. In vain he assured himself that he was a fool—that he had served the meddlesome old woman just as she deserved; he could not shake off the incubus which he thought sat upon him through the wild incantations of Barbara. He begged his brother not to ride any further that day, but to return at once to Dunuton. He proposed to send the horses back to the stables at Bramby by the ostler of the Arden Arms, for he did not feel inclined to visit the old familiar places any more that day.

Filled with anything but re-assuring reflections, and yet not liking to communicate his forebodings to Philip, he rode at a sharp trot to Dunuton. Upon entering the inn-yard, Stanley was surprised to see a group of servants standing in a porch talking earnestly together, as if some unusual occurrence had taken place. When they noticed him they instantly ceased speaking—why, he was at a loss to conjecture. Dismounting and throwing the reins to the ostler, he told him what to do with the horses, and entered the inn, closely followed by Philip. On the staircase he met a waiter. "Where is my father?" he asked.

The man looked terrified, and stammered and hesitated as if he did not like to answer him. Pushing him rudely on one side, Stanley ran upstairs and looked in their sitting-room; Mr. Arden was not there. If he were in the house, the only place in which he was likely to be found was his bedroom. With a palpitating heart Stanley walked hastily along the corridor, until he arrived at the door of his father's bedroom. He fancied he heard voices inside; it was no time to stand upon ceremony, Stanley felt positive that something had happened to his father during his absence; so without the faintest preliminary knock, he pushed the door open and went in. A small, thin, dark-haired man, whom he knew at once to be Mr. Mason, the best doctor Dunuton could boast of, was standing by the bedside. Their eyes met, and the doctor placed his fingers against his lips to enjoin silence. Mr. Mason approached Stanley on tiptoe, and drawing him into a corner, whispered hurriedly in his ear. The substance of what he said was simply this:—Mr. Arden had received a messenger in the early part of the afternoon, who had been sent by the auctioneer to tell him how the things were selling. Everything was going at such absurdly low prices, that the old gentleman put himself in a great passion, which resulted in an apoplectic fit. He had fallen heavily

upon the floor; the noise of his body falling had brought up the waiter; Mr. Arden had been ~~carried~~ in an insensible state into his bedroom, and Dr. Mason was sent for. When Stanley arrived he had been in the room about an hour. The usual remedies had been resorted to, but with slight success: the patient was in a precarious state.

Stanley walked up to the bed, and drew aside the curtains. The old man was lying upon his back, but he opened his eyes and seemed to know his son. Philip hesitated upon the threshold for a short time, but when he understood the state of affairs, he joined his brother. The brothers could tell at a glance that the hours their father had to live were numbered. They could have wished it otherwise, but the ways of Providence are inscrutable, and it was not for them to kick against the pricks; yet a slight murmur trembled on their lips, as they felt the full force of the decree which had gone forth against one dear to them, and more dear now in the days of adversity than when the clouds had not gathered and the storm was afar off. It was strange how jealous these boys were of their father's reputation, the fame that he had won abroad, and the name which he had made for himself in the county where he was born, and where it pleased the weird sisters that he should die. The destruction of Beddington Wood was an event that Stanley deprecated, because it would bring his father into bad odour amongst their friends; and he was glad that such a course had been avoided by the decided tone he had himself adopted the night before.

Mr. Arden, though very weak, and scarcely possessing sufficient strength to speak, made an effort to do so. He told his sons that he knew he was dying, and he hoped there was no profanity or anything irreligious in his saying that he was not sorry his hour had come. He had a request to make before he quitted this world for ever—the last he should ever make to them, and he trusted they had sufficient regard for him to promise what he wished. One of the bitterest pangs that, amidst all his troubles, he had battled against, was the reflection that Bramly would pass out of the family. He had hoped to have kept it intact, and have transmitted it to Stanley as his father had transmitted it to him. It was to be purchased by a rich man whom nobody knew, but he had offered a price for it which the mortgagees thought sufficient, and which they had decided on accepting. Mr. Arden solemnly exhorted his sons to live for one object alone,—to centre all their ambition, all their energy, and all their steadfastness of moral purpose, in the one sole grand and noble endeavour, the nature of which he was about to communicate to them. They listened attentively, wondering much what their father's command would be. The sun was setting, and its last pale rays danced fantastically about the room, as Mr. Arden raised himself on his elbow, and gazing first at one and then at the other, with a strange light in

his unnaturally lustrous eyes, exclaimed in tremulous accents—"Buy back Bramly!"

He had exerted himself so much in the endeavour to utter this parting command, that his failing strength was exhausted, and he fell back on the pillows and gasped for breath. He continued to talk at intervals, in jerky, disconnected sentences, telling them to make money, to undergo privations, and keep the one idea steadily in mind; to pull together, and allow no silly rivalry to separate; to amalgamate their resources, but, above all, to "buy back Bramly." Then he asked them to promise him most sacredly that they would do so. He held out his trembling hand, and they placed theirs within it; and then, in the light of the setting sun, in the solitude of the sick chamber, in all the solemnities that such a scene is likely to inspire in the minds of the young and susceptible, the brothers, to the evident delight of their dying father, vowed by all they held dear that their main object in life should be, to buy back Bramly.

Mr. Arden smiled with ineffable sweetness, as if he was about to carry the vow with him and register it in a better world; and his spirit passed from him, so silently, so quietly, so gently, that those who were standing by were unaware of his death till some minutes afterwards. They were unusually surprised by the legacy he had left them; and, sanguine though they were, the brothers could not help thinking, that in the fight they had undertaken to wage for a specific object, it was "odds against them."

* * * * *

To leave the place where you were born, and where you have passed the best part of your existence, is an arduous undertaking. If you look upon the occurrence in the most prosaic light, you will see that such a parting has its pangs. Suppose you have been a clerk in the City, and some influential friend has made interest for you at the antipodes—obtained employment for you at Shanghai, say, in some famous silk house. In spite of your five hundred a-year to start with, and various small privileges, you cannot help a feeling of regret which defies repression. During the long voyage, which cigars and chess will not make less tedious, you sigh for the shady precincts of the Exchange, with its strange and garish frescoes, its advertisements, and its Old World beadle, who will shut the door in your face about half-past three, which, if you happen to be in a stockbroker's office in Lombard Street, and are sent to get the latest prices, is a great nuisance, necessitating a circuit which makes you longer than you otherwise would be. In Shanghai, the cool retreats of Gresham House are no longer yours, and Capel Court is little better than a myth. In a foreign country you may find many things which are both pleasant and new; but what can compensate for the steak from the gridiron, or the chop which hisses and smokes upon your plate? What is an equivalent for those charming resorts in which

the juvenile mind so much delights, those haunts, those scenes, those places, which from association are so dear to you? Nothing but long continuance and new ties can lessen the bitterness of exile.

To the Ardens, absence from Bramly—dear old Bramly!—was especially distressing. They were born in the old house which they had quitted for ever; they knew every nook and cranny on the estate; there was not a hedge which produced better blackberries than others with which they were unacquainted; they could find the best dog-roses and the finest wild-hazels, and they had traversed every inch of stubble and woodland in search of game. Stanley Arden felt, as he quitted Dunuton, as if he had been robbed of his birthright. The new proprietor of Bramly was a man who had no friends or connections in the county, but he was a wealthy man. Although Stanley had never seen him, he positively hated him. He did not as yet understand the ups and downs of life, and he could make no allowance for a man who was successful where his father had failed.

After the funeral obsequies of Mr. Arden, the brothers went to London. They had very little money at their command, barely a thousand pounds between them, but that was more than sufficient for their pressing necessities, and they were content with the remnant which had been saved from the wreck of a splendid property. Of course they took lodgings, for staying at an hotel would soon have ruined them. They were much attached to one another, and in the mind of each their father's command to buy back Bramly was ever uppermost. A letter arrived one day when they were at breakfast; it was directed to Stanley, and he opened it. After reading its contents his face flushed with a gratified expression, and he handed it to his brother. It was from Lord Furzon, who said:—"I take the earliest opportunity of writing to you, although you would have heard from me sooner had the people at the Arden Arms been acquainted with your address, which I discovered by accidentally meeting Fewes. The members of the Arrowstone Hunt met the other day, when the matter of Beddington was taken into consideration. Mr. Arden's behaviour was so much approved of, and we all thought he had behaved so magnificently, that we decided unanimously to rent the Wood from you. Perhaps that will be more to your advantage than selling it, for, in spite of the advocates of the Corn Laws, landed property is annually increasing in value, and at some future time you might sell Beddington to some Conservative foxhunter for a large sum of money. If, my dear Arden, you will consent to our proposition, we shall be glad to give you three hundred a-year for the use of Beddington, and I assure you we are conferring no favour upon you in so doing; we consider that we are very much benefited by the acquisition, for there is no question that the Wood is the best cover in the two counties. We are all sincerely sorry that you

are not amongst us, but we shall look forward to your return at no distant time. Will you allow me to say, that I shall always feel the strongest gratification at seeing you at my house; pray tell your brother the same thing. With the kindest regards for your welfare, and the best wishes for your success in life——” Here he concluded.

“That is very kind of Furzon,” exclaimed Philip.

“Yes, just what I should have expected from him,” replied Stanley. “But here is another letter, which I did not notice at first; it is half-hidden under my plate. By Jove!” he added, breaking the seal and unfolding it, “it’s from Stanbridge!”

“Do you mean Stanbridge, captain of our Eleven when we went down to Eton to play the fellows there the first year after the Lord’s matches were stopped?”

“Yes, you know him well enough.”

“Of course I do; what does he say?”

“I’ll tell you: he puts it in a very gentlemanly way, but he says he has heard of our leaving Bramly, and he wants to know if a private secretaryship would be of any use to me, because if it will he can give me one. He says he has just been returned for Stockleigh, and he would very much like to have an old friend about him. What do you say?—shall I accept it?”

“I should think so, my dear fellow,” replied Philip; “it will make your fortune.”

Stanley, whose knowledge of the world was greater—a little greater—than that of his enthusiastic brother, smiled. He thought that to be the private secretary of one who was likely to be a rising parliamentary man, was a step on the ladder of Fortune; but he had a slight intuitive inkling of the trouble, the worry, the annoyance, the perseverance, and the fortitude that it is necessary for those who wait upon the fickle goddess to undergo and possess. Philip shook his brother by the hand in a kindly manner, telling him that he congratulated him upon his good-luck with all his heart: and he meant what he said; he liked his brother, and he made no secret of his predilection.

After breakfast the brothers separated; Stanley to go to his old acquaintance, Henry Stanbridge, the open-hearted, good-natured, high-principled member for Stockleigh, whose father had been extensively engaged in commercial pursuits. This is the language of the biographers—the plain English of the phrase being, that he was a large cotton merchant at Stockleigh. His father had recently died, and he had come into a very fine business, which many scions of noble houses would have given up their hereditary rank to possess; rank, in this country, without wealth being little worth, and more productive of embarrassment to the owner than anything else. A clerkship in a Government office is like a position in the area of a workhouse; you are not absolutely within the charitable precincts, but at any rate you are not far off, and be-

yond, those offsprings of Nepotism, the destitute aristocracy, are not accustomed to view much.

Philip was one of those quiet, reserved, uncommunicative, impenetrable people, who always walk about as if they had a secret of vital importance concealed somewhere about them. There is a sort of *arcanum magnum* gleam in their eyes; the Philosopher's Stone lurks in every word they utter, and perpetual motion may by care and diligence be discerned in their waistcoat-pockets. As yet he was uncontaminated by the world, he was good-hearted,—embarrassing phrase, indicative of so much, and yet practically explanatory of nothing. What is a good-hearted man? One who loves his mother and subscribes to a charity, who does not object to put his legs under the Freemasons' mahogany, or to see his name in leaded type as a donor of money to the Honourable Society of Pulmonary Pilgrims; but who regrets with tears in his eyes, after the lachrymose, crocodile fashion, that he can only lend you five shillings when you have asked for five pounds, who wrings your hand with severity, and offers you half of his hymn-book in church.

Philip was not merely indulging in a purposeless walk for the benefit of his health; on the contrary, he had an object in going at a quick pace in the direction of the City when he left his brother. He might have had a cab if he had wished it, for he had the money in his pocket, or he might have patronized a metropolitan stage carriage, had he been so minded; but he was a frugal and a saving man, he never forgot that there are twelve pence in a shilling, twenty shillings in a pound, and that four farthings make one copper coin. He believed in infinitesimal beginnings; and as he had some time to spare and wanted a walk, he thought he would take a main thoroughfare and inquire his way to the City.

The avenues leading to the City present a curious spectacle in the day-time; you see the roadway choked up with vehicles of every description, amongst which the ponderous omnibus towers like a giraffe amongst zebras. Take Fleet Street, and select Bride Court as a coigne of vantage. The police will not interfere with you, because you can pretend to be looking at the caricatures in the window of the office of "Punch." See what a hurrying, worrying, struggling throng goes past, diving into this alley and burrowing into that court. These little veins are by no means so insignificant as they look—they minister to the main body. In one is situated the famous printing house from whence so many interesting sheets are issued, and not far off is the den in which the pretty painted covers which embellish the railway novels are made.

Philip was going to call upon a man who had been a friend of his father's. He was a stockbroker, and Mr. Arden had done a great deal of business with him. His idea was, that he would most probably assist him in some way, for Philip believed in trade and business of some sort; although he was well-born, he had no silly

pride in his composition, such as blocks up the channels of success, and prevents your energies from expanding. Mr. Hawksenden was a broker in a very good way of business; he had numerous clients, and he knew as well as possible how to turn the nimble ninenpence. He would study the political horizon, and if he saw lowering clouds gathering in the distance, he would give for the "put" of Consols, and just catch his quarter per cent, for he never turned up his nose at five or ten pounds, and always had a bad opinion of a man who went in for large profits. Mr. Hawksenden lived in Throgmorton Street, on the first-floor of a house upon whose lintel many names were painted. Philip ascended the dark stairs, every step of which was covered with sheet-lead, as oil-cloth would have been very much like a cart-load of corn in Egypt during the year of famine, that is to say, it would not have gone far. Upon the landing Philip hesitated, to reconnoitre and to collect his thoughts. It was a way of his; he did not exactly make up what he was going to say, but he arranged his trains of thought, and prepared himself for probable contingencies. There were two doors; one had written upon its glass upper part, "Mr. Hawksenden;" the other was simply inscribed with the word, "Private." The first door further informed you that inside was the office of a stock and share broker. Philip had never seen Mr. Hawksenden at his office; but he had once run down to Bramly for a few days' shooting, on which occasion his bag, after severe toil in going over the stubble, consisted of six partridges and one leveret, the latter killed by the gamekeeper as the poor creature was limping off with a broken leg. He wondered whether he would remember him; he was inclined to think he would. He opened the door with timidity, and entered. That part of the room near the fireplace, which was filled with shavings, was open, and furnished with chairs—repulsive-looking chairs, whose cane bottoms seemed to warn you against trespassing under heavy penalties, amongst which a severe attack of cramp was one of the most endurable. A large desk divided the front part near the window. At each side of this were two stools, occupied respectively by four clerks. One of them was a young man of feminine appearance, very dark, with his hair parted in the middle, and well-dressed, but with certain peculiarities about his attire which, had you seen him at the West End, would have told you he was an importation from that region where gold and precious stones may be found, where hard work such as would achieve the labours of Hercules, is to be heard of, but where the amenities of polite circles are not cultivated to any great extent. He turned his large, full eyes upon Philip, and inquired in a languid tone of voice, which had nothing masculine in its silvery diapason, what he wanted. Philip replied by asking for Mr. Hawksenden. Another clerk, with the officiousness peculiar to the race, stuck his lingual pitchfork into the dialogue, and exclaimed, "'s engaged; won't b'long;" and then he threw his eyes upon the ledger, and

went on casting up accounts, in a way which would soon have calculated the amount of bullion in the vaults of the Bank of England, or the number of days in the life of that octo-centenarian, Methuselah,—but the latter is an abstruse mathematical problem, which, in common fairness to the limited intellects of the younger members of the untitled aristocracy who vegetate in commercial pursuits, should be left to the calculating machine.

“Take a chair,” said the feminine clerk.

Philip obeyed this command, and waited patiently until Mr. Hawksenden made his appearance, which he did shortly. A short, thick-set man was walking by his side; he shook hands with the broker, and said, “You won’t forget; sell the Maritana Centrals, and buy me fifty Metropolitan Cabs and Carriages. If you can get some Utilization of Sewage and General Manures, I don’t mind having them, but they must be below par. Good morning. I shall look in. You can send the contracts to my house. Good morning.”

“Now, sir, what is it?” exclaimed Mr. Hawksenden, as the glass door slammed behind the outgoing client.

The broker was a middle-sized, dark man, clever, quick, and industrious; he had some stock phrases, amongst which these were prominent:—“What can I do for you this morning?” “Quite so, clearly,” “Of course,” which he pronounced “Of curse.” He talked in a rapid manner, and was impatient of long conversations.

“Don’t you remember me?” asked Philip.

“Can’t say I do; memory’s not bad, either.”

“You knew Mr. Arden, of Bramly?”

“Of course—quite so, clearly,” replied Mr. Hawksenden.

“I am his youngest son,” said Philip, looking, up as if the announcement was a recommendation and a passport to universal favour; just as being seen at Lady Jersey’s, some years ago, was an introduction to the best society in London.

“Oh, indeed!” replied the broker; “glad to see you. Come inside.”

Philip followed him into a small room, upon a table in which were lying the best daily papers. When they were both seated, Mr. Hawksenden said, “Now, what can I do for you? Want to dabble a little in stocks? Dangerous game, without you’ve good information; and then I’ve seen people lose, lose thousands, on the very best information. Your poor father—saw it in the papers—was a great man, and Mr. Serpentine—both of them great men for speculating; but it requires a head as long as from here to the top of the pen in the hand of St. Peter over the cathedral at Rome to make money here. So, if you will allow me to say so, I should advise you to give up the idea if you are left well off. Keep what you have, sir, and don’t try to get rich in a hurry.”

Philip felt embarrassed at this speech, but he felt that he had a task to go through, and he girded himself up for the trial. He

wanted to work for his living, and he was not going to be dismayed because he had a slight disinclination to ask for the labour which he hoped would some day produce him the amount requisite for the repurchase of Bramly.

"The fact is, Mr. Hawksenden," said Philip, "my father has left my brother and myself little or nothing, and we are obliged to do something for ourselves. Stanley, I am happy to say, has had a secretaryship offered him this morning, and consequently he is provided for, and I——"

"Let us be brief," exclaimed Mr. Hawksenden, interrupting him; "excuse me, you know, but I suppose you fancy you have a claim upon me through my being your father's broker, and you want to become a City man?"

There was an absence of delicacy and refinement about this speech, but then it was practical, and there is a great deal in that. A blow on the head is an exhibition of physical strength, but it is none the worse for being delivered through the medium of a boxing-glove. Philip blushed, and looking up, encountered the sharp, twinkling, restless grey eye of the broker fixed upon him. He was awaiting his reply to the home question he had put to him, and it was an easy one to reply to, yet Philip hesitated. Perhaps he had feelings susceptible of a wound; but what right has a man in search of employment to have such girlish feelings? Let him take his snubbings bravely, and make the best of them, because he is sure to meet with them, and no amount of kicking will improve the condition of one who has nothing but pricks to kick against. He did not think that he had a claim upon Mr. Hawksenden, but he imagined that he would be likely to help him, because he had known his father and stayed at his house, been on terms of intimacy with him, and done his Stock Exchange business for him during many years. Certainly, you have a right to expect more from a friend than from a stranger. It is very much like the theory some people have about relations,—they say that one relation is not justified in expecting any assistance from another; but this is simply absurd. If you cannot look for sympathy and help in the time of need from a relation, the hour of misfortune becomes very black indeed; for when your own kith and kin turn their backs upon you, your prospect of finding aid outside the domestic circle is very remote, so much so as to lie upon the shores of the antipodes of Hope.

Philip did not exactly fire up and assert his independence by putting on his hat and walking out of the place; he was much too cautious and prudent a man to do anything of the sort. He replied with just that amount of dignity which he thought would be the salvation of his self-respect, "I don't think I have any claim upon you, but knowing as I do that you were acquainted with my father, I thought I would offer you my services; of course you can take them for what they are worth. I have had no ex-

perience of the Stock Exchange, but I daresay I could learn in a short time. Everything must have a beginning, you know, Mr. Hawksenden."

"I should be excessively glad to serve you," said the broker, "but I don't see how I can do it. I have four clerks in the office now, and my business does not require another. If you could wait a little while, something might turn up, or I could speak to some of my friends."

"If you would, I should be much obliged."

This was all Philip could say; he was profoundly disappointed, and every lineament of his expressive face showed it. Mr. Hawksenden did not seem to understand that his juvenile visitor could feel acute mortification. "He is only a boy," he thought, "and he will try somebody else. If I see Reynolds, the great share-dealer, I'll speak about him, but I've no room for him myself. There's that cousin of mine coming next week, and my wife will be angry to a degree if I prefer some one with whom she is not acquainted to one of her relations." The idea of offending his wife was very dreadful to Mr. Hawksenden. In common with most Englishmen, he preserved an amount of reverence and veneration for the partner of his existence, which, if not servile, was certainly uxorious. So he dashed Philip's hopes, and dismissed a promising young man who would have been a credit to him, because he was afraid of his wife. What a comment on matrimony! The broker held out his hand for Philip to grasp, as a signal that he wished the interview to be at an end. It is generally observable that people who think they have got rid of an importunate visitor wish him good-bye with a sort of kingly grace, which is as common to the prime minister who dismisses the hungry place-hunter with a smile upon his Janus's lips, as it is of our friend Grain, of Mark Lane, who bows a dismissal to a loquacious traveller with whom he does not wish to do business. They are always civil to you when you are going. The sigh of relief rises up in their breasts, and they ring the bell for the next applicant to be admitted. They are not to be blamed, for public men and men of business, during their working hours, are very much like badgers being drawn and baited by ferocious dogs, who sometimes will not take "No" for an answer. Had Philip understood the value of this grand precept, "Never take 'No' for an answer," he might have been more successful than he was; the broker might have unbended so far as to patronize him and ask him to come home to dinner with him; he would have introduced him as "Youngest son of my old friend Arden—heard me talk of him, my dear—Indian judge and large landed proprietor; did business for him for many years. Gone now, poor fellow! Well, we can't last for ever, and a black hatband is a necessary article occasionally."

Philip, unfortunately, was not pertinacious enough; he had some of the nature of the leech in him, but he was too modest,

too young, and too inexperienced to apply it as it requires to be applied. He put on his hat with a lugubrious air, which spoke of vexation of spirit as clearly as did the face of Ahab when coveting the vineyard of Naboth, before Jezebel gave him the pernicious advice which caused him to despoil his subject of his property. The broker shook hands with him, and accompanied him to the door; but just as he was about to make his exit in a state of prostration, a man entered, upon whom his eyes were instantly fixed. He was tall and of a commanding figure, well-made, and extremely gentlemanly in appearance. He was dressed in an unexceptional manner, and wore an eye-glass, which dangled from his neck, round which it was suspended by a thin piece of elastic. It was not a heavy affair of gold and gems, but simply a piece of glass fixed in an ebony frame, small, elegant, and genteel. He placed his glass in his eye and looked at Philip, elevating his aristocratic brows in some surprise. Philip recoiled in either alarm or disgust, it was difficult to say which; an expression of hatred pervaded his features, and putting his hands in his pockets, he was about to leave the office, when the new-comer clapped him on the shoulder, exclaiming, "Is your father here?"

"My father is dead," replied Philip, regarding him scathingly.

"Dead! that is sudden; I was not prepared for that. And what are you doing in the City?"

"You had better ask your friend Mr. Hawksenden; he can tell you," answered Philip, doggedly. "One thing you can guess, and that is, I did not come into the City to find *you*; had I expected to meet you, I should have gone out of town to avoid the possibility."

"Mr. Arden has taken a fancy for a City life, and wanted to know if I had any room for him in the office. I told him I had not; couldn't turn one of my fellows out—of course not."

"Do what he asks," replied the stranger, with a look of peculiar significance, which was evidently intended as a command.

"Come inside; we will talk it over," ejaculated the broker, appearing much put out.

"I will call again in a day or two," said Philip; "in the meantime you may come to some arrangement; only pray do not be influenced against your will by this gentleman."

Without paying the man for whom he had so palpable a dislike the slightest attention, he nodded to Mr. Hawksenden and went away. He was the prey of violent emotion. The man whom he had just encountered was Henry Serpentine, his father's ally and adviser, the one who had ruined him, and brought about the calamitous events which unquestionably caused the old man's death. Philip looked upon him as a deadly enemy, and hated him from the bottom of his heart. He had no idea that he was in England, he had been told that he was abroad; so that his meeting with him in the City was totally unlooked for and unexpected.

He thought that Mr. Serpentine had lured his father on to his destruction and benefited by his fall. Far too clever a man to risk his own property upon a single throw, he had speculated with the money belonging to another; and when that other was poverty-stricken and broken-spirited, he tied up his purse-strings and left him in the dilemma, out of which he might scramble as best he could. Philip resented an injury to his father more than he would have done one to himself; and it was with a shudder and an inward feeling of creeping horror that he passed from the presence of this man and emerged into the street, where he could breathe uncontaminated air.

It will have been remarked that Philip Arden was of a pushing disposition; he was not easily discouraged, and he possessed perseverance in a marked degree. Perhaps it was constitutional; it is with some men. They like to get up at six in the morning, and begin money-grubbing as early as they can. They are fond of being on their legs all day, and when they have been working for hours incessantly, they go to a vestry meeting, or the House of Commons, or to a debating society, and make a vigorous speech upon a subject which, from its recondite nature, would have puzzled most men. If they are not Demosthenic, if elocution is lost upon them, and eloquence is not their strong point, they go to some remote place, and turn to Confucius for a little light reading, or find relaxation in the Homeric account of the battle of the frogs, laughing heartily at the various phases of the contest. Philip had light grey eyes, and men who possess them are generally restless and worrying; with grey eyes, with light hair, a penetrating glance, a slightly insipid manner, but ardent and enterprising when you know them. They constitute a class which may be called the hardworkers, the busy bees of the social hive, those before whom the drones vanish and disappear, sinking into insignificance like so much useless lumber. Those are the men who will not take "No" for an answer, who smile when you disappoint their expectations, and who take up their hats in a placid manner when you dash their hopes to the ground by an emphatic refusal of their request; who blandly tell you they will do themselves the pleasure of calling upon you in a day or two, and keep their words most remorselessly; who will not go away when they are told you are busy, and who will wait for you if you happen to be out. They lay little traps for you, and catch hold of your button-hole in obscure passages, and hang on to you with the clinging pertinacity of a leech, until you do what they ask you to, because, like the unjust judge, you are actually badgered into it.

Philip had an opinion that a bow with only one string was not a very useful weapon to go into battle with. Suppose the one cord were to break, you would in that case be defenceless and at the mercy of your enemies. He had not gone to Mr. Hawksenden

because he had a particular fancy for Stock Exchange business, but because men made money at it. There was a man his father used often to speak of, the celebrated B. B., he had commenced life in a broker's office at a salary of a pound a week; he scraped and saved, and never wasted a farthing, until he collected a little money together. In the evening he used to copy papers and deeds for a law stationer, so that he became in time a small capitalist; then he listened here, and picked up a little information there, and read all the papers and studied politics, until he made up his mind that something was going to happen, which would throw Capel Court into a state of perturbation. He put his money into Consols, and backed them to go down within a month; his time-bargain was successful. War was declared, and the funds fell nearly eight per cent. This gave him something to start with; luck was in his favour, and he in the course of time made a large fortune. Philip wanted to emulate so glorious an example, but he was not at all averse to turning his industry into another channel. What he wished for was something to get a living by, something through which to make money and buy back Bramly.

An old friend of the late Mr. Arden occupied a position of considerable trust and importance in the India House; he was one of the members of the Council, and had been acquainted with him in Calcutta; but instead of vegetating on his return to the country in which he was born, he turned his attention to practical pursuits, from which he derived fame and position. Sir Stephen Cairfull was one of the remarkable men of his day, and fully deserved the eulogiums which were heaped upon him. Being in the neighbourhood, Philip thought he would call upon Sir Stephen, and ask his assistance in some way. He asked his way to the India House in Leadenhall Street, and was not long in finding that excrescence of bricks and mortar, which has happily been pulled down since then; he walked up the broad flight of steps, passing a dusky-hued Mahometan, who was shining in all the splendour of cashmere robes and a dazzling turban. The messenger inside conducted him along a passage with a stone floor, and handed him over to another attendant. This one gave him a little more exercise of a perambulatory nature, and delivered him into the custody of a third satellite, who led him to a small door, at which he knocked; he was told to come in, and shortly afterwards Philip was admitted. He found the great man to whose care, amongst that of others, the destinies of millions of the human race were in a certain way committed. Sir Stephen was rather below the average height, and possessed a countenance the expression of which was forbidding, although intellectual. He received Philip kindly, listened to his story, and told him, that if he wished it he could give him a clerkship in the India House: "But you must bear in mind," he said, "that it will only be worth ninety pounds a-year to you. You will have to work tolerably hard, and I will under-

take to say you will find your employment irksome. If you can do anything else, by all means try it. If you fail, and you wish to fall back upon Government service as a last resort, come to me again, and you shall have what is in my power to give you."

Philip pulled rather a long face at this, but his common sense told him that what Sir Stephen said was perfectly true, so he gave up all idea of the India House and its clerkships, and walked gloomily along the damp corridors, which, in their hideous angularity, were redolent with red-tapeism. He stood on the steps of the India House for a brief space, wondering what he should do next. His meditations were interrupted by a cheery voice, which exclaimed in his ear, "Arden, old fellow, how are you?"

He turned round hastily, and recognized a young man who had been in the same form with him at Winchester. There is a sort of freemasonry amongst public-school men, and so Philip ran his arm through that of his friend, and they were soon walking along the street chatting gaily.

"What were you doing at the India House, Forrester?" asked Philip, looking up interrogatively in his friend's face.

"I took a letter for one of the bigwigs there. You know I am in my father's office now—rather a let down, I suppose you think, from being a prefect at Winchester and second captain of football; but I wasn't born with a silver spoon in my mouth, though I believe you were."

"If I was," replied Philip, "the silver has turned to lead in a marvellously skilful way. But tell me all about yourself, will you?"

"I haven't much to tell. We are in the tea trade, and do a little in silk occasionally, when the markets offer us the produce on advantageous terms. And now what were you mooning about the City for?"

"Because I was looking for something to do."

"Nonsense! what has happened? Nothing serious, I hope."

"I can tell you in half-a-dozen words," replied Philip: "my father's dead, and he has left my brother and myself in such a position that we must do something."

"By Jove!" said Forrester; "you surprise me. I thought you were a languid swell, doing the Park on horseback, and driving about in mail phaetons, and lounging in opera boxes; I even associated you with tawny whiskers."

"That was rather a stretch of the imagination," answered Philip, with a laugh.

"Will you come to the office?" said Forrester; "it is not far off—just a little way up Fenchurch Street. I suppose you would not care about anything commercial, because Forrester and Son are in want of a clever fellow to manage a certain part of their business, which requires fidelity and skill. I suppose, though, offering you anything is like a mouse talking to a lion?"

"Not at all," answered Philip, promptly. "Will you come to

my lodgings after business and dine with me? we can then talk at our ease. I know you are busy now." And so it was settled.

Serpentine's interest in Philip Arden was simulated for a purpose. He had robbed Mr. Arden of almost all he possessed, and at one time, by a deed of gift, obtained an estate worth seventy thousand pounds. With the money he had so infamously possessed himself of, he was enabled to live like a prince wherever he went. It is said, and well said, that with the acquisition of money comes an increased greed of gain. The more Henry Serpentine had, the more he wanted. He was insatiable. He heard that the young Ardens had a few paternal acres left them, and, incredible as it may seem, he coveted them; he could not rest until he had the title-deed of the Beddington Wood Estate in his custody. In order to acquire this property, he was civil and obliging to Philip Arden, though it caused him great pain to be so. Having wronged their father, he had a most unnatural and unreasonable hatred for the family; he detested them root and branch. The root was gone, but the branches were living; they were mute protests against his usurpations. If he disgorged what was really theirs, they would not have been compelled to work for the living of which he had deprived them. He obtained the address of the young men from Mr. Hawksenden, and unexpectedly paid them a visit one evening. Both Philip and Stanley were indignant at his presence, and treated him coldly.

"Forgive me," he said, "for intruding unbidden upon your privacy. I have your welfare at heart, and I wish to do all that lays in my power for you."

"Pray pardon me for doubting your professions of disinterestedness, Mr. Serpentine," exclaimed Stanley; "when we remember how you conducted and benefited by the spoliation of my father's estate, we are sceptical."

"You wrong me, you do indeed, my dear boy. I came here this evening to suggest a means of obtaining money. You have the Beddington Wood, I believe—is it not so?"

"It is ours."

"That is what I wanted to know. I was with a parliamentary agent to-day, and he informed me that a railroad will cut through the estate. I don't know whether there is anything in the title-deeds which will entitle you to larger compensation than is usually given, but I will consult a solicitor, if you will kindly favour me with the parchments."

Stanley was completely thrown off his guard by the plausible way in which Serpentine stated his case, and going to a bureau, he took out the deeds, and foolishly handed them to his father's destroyer, who placed them in his pocket, and checking a sardonic smile, said, "Thanks, dear boy; you shall have them back in a day or two, and I trust I shall have some good news to communicate to you."

After a little further conversation Serpentine took his leave, promising Philip an engagement in Mr. Hawksenden's office within a week.

Days passed by, and the young men heard nothing of Mr Serpentine; he had, it was supposed, gone abroad. Stanley's agent in the country told him that he had received notice that Beddington Wood had changed hands, and that he was in future to account to Mr. Serpentine. Frantic with rage, Stanley consulted a solicitor, who told him he was afraid he could do nothing in the matter unless a Chancery suit was instituted, and that was expensive. There was another difficulty in the way; Mr. Serpentine was resident abroad, his favourite abiding-place was Naples. He would telegraph to a friend there, and ask for any particulars respecting Serpentine; and he did so. I was the manipulator who sent the queries flying through sea and air:—

"Englishman of the name of Serpentine; resident in Naples, and very rich. What do you know of him? Is he now in Naples?"

That was the telegram.

Answer:—"Serpentine is now in England. I am his adviser here. Has gone over about some property, a wood in a midland county. Reputation bad here; not in good society, and generally disliked. Plenty of money. Expected back in a day or two."

Stanley returned home disconsolate; he did not know what action to take in the matter, but he began to see that he had been most cruelly robbed by a plausible and most unscrupulous scoundrel.

That evening Philip had an invitation to dine with his City friend Forrester, at a West-end club, and he had been asked to take his brother. They went together. In the midst of dinner, Stanley suddenly sprang to his feet, and rushing towards a gentleman, grasped him by the collar. It was Serpentine, who had paid a flying visit to his club.

"Scoundrel!" cried Stanley Arden, "you shall not escape me! Give me back my property, or I at once hand you over to the police."

Serpentine struggled fiercely, but Stanley held him with the strength of a lion. The waiters came up and interposed. Serpentine shook off Stanley, and ran swiftly from the club, and was seen no more. Forrester and Philip endeavoured to pacify Stanley, but without avail; he was deeply agitated. "The villain has escaped me," he said, "but he cannot surely escape the vengeance of Heaven."

Nor did he; the speech was prophetic. Three months elapsed. It subsequently transpired that, in his hurry to escape from Stanley Arden, Serpentine rushed blindly into the street, and was knocked down by a cab; he received severe injuries, which necessitated his removal to a hospital. When he was able to quit the walls of the charitable institution, he, by the advice of his physician, sought the inland watering-place called Buxton, where he endeavoured to

recruit his wasted energies. But the numerous excesses of his youth now warred against his recovery, and he became daily worse and worse.

At the end of the month of September, 18—, I was in the West-End office of the Telegraphic Company I then had the honour to serve, when I received the following message:—"From Henry Serpentine, Buxton, Derbyshire, to Stanley Arden, Bury Street, St. James's.—Dear boy, forgive me; I am dying. Come at once, that I may with my last breath restore the property of which I have so long deprived you."

There being no boy in the office at the time, and seeing that the message was most urgent, I put on my hat and ran round to Bury Street with it. I found the Ardens at tea. It was only natural that they should be rejoiced at the news I brought them. In an hour's time they were on the road to Buxton. In their presence Henry Serpentine made a will, which gave them all the money of which he was possessed, which was amply sufficient to buy back Bramly; in return for which they frankly and freely gave him their forgiveness.

But it so happened, that there was no necessity for that. Stanley became acquainted with the new possessor of his ancestral domains, and married his daughter; so that, in the natural sequence of events, he came to his own again; while Philip Arden obtained distinction in the commercial world, and bought an estate near his brother.

This history I learnt afterwards from their own lips, for they always accounted me a friend. Had I not at once gone with the telegram, Serpentine would have died without doing justice, and his wealth would have gone to his brother, who was unacquainted with this Secret of the Telegraph.

III.—QUICKER THAN LIGHTNING.

A DISTINGUISHED telegraph company, in whose service I had the honour of working for many years, had their chief office not far from Charing Cross. In this office I was chief clerk. One wintry, windy day in the boisterous month of March, when rude Boreas had it all his own way, and clouds of dust were careering to the sky, a middle-aged man entered the office, and taking up a form began to write. Presently he looked up, and exclaimed, addressing me, "I suppose it is a matter of indifference to you whether you send messages in English, French, or German?"

"Quite so, sir. We merely send the letters, and we do not care if the words are Sanscrit, so long as they are properly transmitted, and made intelligible to your correspondent."

"Do you ever send messages in cypher?" he inquired.

"Frequently."

"Ah! that is what I wanted to know," he exclaimed; "for I am desirous of sending some commercial intelligence to a friend at Liverpool, and I should not like my news to be read by anyone."

"You may rely upon the secrecy of our *employés*."

"No doubt, no doubt; but as you have no objection to sending my message in a disguised shape, I shall take the liberty of clothing it in a garb unintelligible to anyone but my friend."

"As you please, sir," I replied. "I must inform you, however, that the charge will be higher than the rate for the transmission of ordinary messages."

"That is a trifle," he said, waving his hand carelessly.

He went on writing, and I had a good opportunity of observing him. He appeared to be a man of between forty-five and fifty. He was well dressed, and wore a thick frieze overcoat; his hat was neatly brushed, and he looked like a well-to-do merchant; a small pair of blue spectacles assisted his impaired powers of vision. His hair was short, curly, and I thought preternaturally dry; it was more like a well-kept wig than anything else, but it was difficult to suppose that a man in the prime of life, or thereabouts, should discard his natural hirsute appendages and wear those of the practical barber.

"Will this go quickly?" he asked, handing me the sheet which he had disfigured with his illegible caligraphy.

"Yes, sir."

"Quicker than lightning, eh?"

"Quite as quickly, sir, as soon as we put it on the wires."

"Ah! a magnificent invention! Really, science advances in these days with gigantic strides."

"So it does, sir."

"Just read that over, and see if there will be any difficulty in transmitting it."

A strange message it was, too; I could not make head or tail of it, and gave him credit for some talent in manufacturing cypher. It ran thus:—

"Ihttn a gftsas bilt n brtrma aot'apob tcsi wltma 3 otm—ave aken he otes nd old rom he afe nd hall e n iverpool o ight e eady o eeivo e nd t nce ake assage n oard he unard teamer sis hich eaves he ersey t clock omorrow orning."

"Can you make anything of it?" he inquired, with a dry smile.

"Not much, sir."

"Can you send it for me?—that is the main thing."

"Oh, yes, we can send it safe enough. You have, however, forgotten the name of the person you are communicating with."

"Have I omitted that? That is silly. Give me back the paper."

"Shall I fill in the names for you?" I asked, with a civility which, in business at least, is at all times part and parcel of my nature.

"If you please."

I stood with the pen in my hand, ready to write at his dictation.

"It is from G. K., London, to Mr. Abrams, Baltic Lane, Liverpool."

"Will you give me your name in full, sir?"

"It is unnecessary."

"It is a rule of the company's, sir, to have the name and address of the sender of a message," I persisted.

"Oh, if that is the case, I will give it you without the least hesitation. I was merely desirous of saving expense, my good sir, do you see?—of saving expense," he replied, rather embarrassed.

"We make no charge for name and address, sir; we merely charge for the message itself, according to the number of words."

"Very well; my name is—ah—is George Karslake, Lombard Street."

"From Mr. George Karslake, Lombard Street, to Mr. Abrams, Baltic Lane, Liverpool. One pound five, sir."

He paid the money, and after urging me to despatch the message at once, left the office. "Singular old gentleman!" was my mental exclamation when he had taken his departure.

As the message was a difficult one to send, I did not give it to any of the women whom we employed as clerks in the office, but I determined to send it myself, and I also resolved to take the copy home with me, for the purpose of exercising my ingenuity in trying to discover the purport and meaning of the message, which in its present shape was so mysterious. Every cypher, however puzzling, must have its key; and it would be an agreeable amusement to me to puzzle away in the effort to find the key to the one before me.

While I was at work upon the message, and sending it to Liverpool, as the old gentleman had expressed it, "quicker than lightning," one of our boys came in and said, "If you please, sir, Mr. Dudley wishes to see you."

Grasping the handle with one hand, and keeping my eye on the dial of the machine, I said, "Tell him to come in."

Dudley was a famous officer in the Detective force—the very man, in fact, who was mainly instrumental in running Desmond De Vigne to earth—and I opined that he had some business in hand on which he wished to consult me.

"Hard at it!" he exclaimed as he entered.

"Not more so than usual," I answered carelessly.

"I thought you had given up telegraphing," he said; "anything important on?"

"I have got a very funny message to send to Liverpool; it is all in cypher, and I thought it would be safer in my hands than in any other person's."

"Exactly. Well, don't let me interrupt you; my business will keep for a little while."

"I shall not be five minutes now," I answered.

He sat down and took up the paper, while I sent the rest of the message to its destination. When I had finished, I turned to him and exclaimed, "Now, then, Dudley, I am at your service."

"Here goes, then: a robbery on a very large scale has taken place in the City this morning."

"Indeed!"

"The culprit is supposed to be a confidential clerk in the house of Bremen Brothers, the merchants who have been robbed," continued Dudley. "He is a young man, not more than thirty, and has decamped with fifteen thousand pounds in hard cash, that is to say, in notes and gold."

"That is a bold stroke."

"Particularly so."

"In what way can I be of service to you?" I inquired.

"I heard from Bremen Junior that Gillian Kitley—the thief of whom I am speaking—has friends in Liverpool."

"Yes."

"And it is supposed that he will telegraph to them to inform them of his future movements. Will you, to further the ends of justice, let me look over the telegrams you have sent since twelve o'clock to-day?"

"Certainly; but you had better begin with this," I said, handing him the cypher of George Karslake.

He took it, and glanced curiously over it. "From George Karslake!" he said, in a tone of surprise, "why, that's G. K."

"Of course it is; what then?"

"Why, just this: G. K. makes Gillian Kitley, the very man I am in search of!"

"Oh!" I ejaculated.

"Describe him to me, and let me have all the particulars of this telegram, if I am not troubling you too much."

"Not at all. The man has not been gone long; I have his features in my mind's eye quite distinctly."

I then described him, but Dudley did not identify him with Kitley by my description.

"Kitley is dark and much younger," he said; "his eyesight is good, and he does not wear spectacles. All that, however, goes for nothing; some men are so clever at disguising themselves, that their own mothers would not know them if they met them accidentally in the street."

"At first," I remarked, "he refused to give me his name; he wished me to send the telegram from 'G. K., Lombard Street!'"

"Where Bremen Brothers' office is," interposed Dudley.

"Is it? That may be a link in your chain. It is a pity we cannot interpret the cypher."

"Let me bewilder myself over it for half an hour," exclaimed Dudley; "I fancy, somehow or other, that we are on the scent. I am a pretty good hand at unravelling mysteries, it is my trade, you know, and I'll do my best to cut this Gordian knot."

I had heard that Dudley was a good hand at reading the cyphers in which thieves correspond; I knew him to be an accomplished detective, and as I left the room to attend to business, I had some hope that he would succeed in his endeavour to solve the mystery.

Half an hour elapsed; I then sought Dudley, who waved me away, saying hurriedly, "I have a clue; indulge me for a short time longer, and I will make all clear to you."

I went away again, and on returning a second time, I saw the detective smilingly regarding something he had written upon a slip of paper.

"Here is the solution of the problem," he said; "I have had some trouble over it, but it was not so difficult as I expected. 'G. K.' is, as I suspected, Gillian Kitley; he telegraphs to his Jewish friend in Baltic Lane, and this is what he says."

I sat down, and listened attentively to what fell from Dudley, who I could see was rather proud of his achievement, which, in point of fact, was most creditable to him. In a clear voice he read the following explanation of the cryptograph:--

"I have taken the notes and gold from the safe, and shall be in Liverpool to-night. Be ready to receive me, and at once take a passage on board the Cunard Steamer *Isis*, which leaves the Mersey at 3 o'clock to-morrow morning."

"And now, in the name of all that's wonderful, let me ask you how you managed to interpret the 'Mene, mene?'" I exclaimed.

"In this way: I at once detected a difference between the first part of the cryptograph and the second. Three words particularly attracted my attention in the latter part—they were, 'iverpool,' 'omorrow,' and 'orning.' Now, 'iverpool' is plainly 'Liverpool' minus one letter; in the same way 'omorrow' and 'orning' make 'to-morrow' and 'morning.' I then took the first letter in the commencement of the telegram, and the first word in the latter portion. I could make nothing of them, so I abandoned the letter *I*, which I subsequently found was the personal pronoun. The second letter, *h*, tacked on to the word 'ave,' made 'have.' I now began to see my way; 'aken,' with the missing *t*, was 'taken.' I had distinctly, 'I have taken.' Do you comprehend me?"

"Perfectly; and I give you great praise for your cleverness."

"Well; after having made out the beginning, my course was clear, it was all plain sailing. My visit to you to-day was a fortunate one. Mr. Abrams, of Baltic Lane, will have a visitor this evening that he does not reckon upon."

"You will make a clever capture," I said.

"I hope so, most sincerely. Bremen Brothers have offered a large reward for the apprehension of Kitley, which, as I have been

rather unlucky lately, will be very acceptable; and as I allowed a man to get away the other day by a most transparent device, I shall, by taking Kitley, regain my lost prestige."

"I am rejoiced to hear it. I wish I could be of service to you."

"You can," said Dudley, shortly and decisively.

"In what way?"

"You would have no difficulty, I suppose, in recognizing your G. K.?"

"Not the slightest."

"Very well," replied Dudley; "I will, if you like, apply for you to accompany me to Liverpool for the purpose of identification."

"Nothing I should like better. I have no arrangements to make, and can go at a moment's notice," I exclaimed, pleased at the prospect of an adventure, while I should have the additional advantage of a change of air and scene, the value of which all hard-worked London men know full well how to appreciate.

"We have no time to lose," said Dudley. "The passage Kitley asks Abrams to take for him is palpably one to New York. The Cunard steamers run to New York, and the *Isis* is one of the most celebrated of them."

"Why not arrest him at the station?"

"That would not answer my purpose," replied Dudley. "I not only want the man, but I want the plunder; he is sure to bring it, or the proceeds, with him to Abrams' house, and we shall have little or no difficulty in killing the two birds with one stone. I have no objection, though, to travel in the same train with him; if I am not mistaken, he will go by the express which leaves London at five o'clock."

"I am with you," said I, bowing deferentially to his superior judgment.

The necessary application to the authorities of the Telegraph Company was made, and I was granted leave of absence for a day or two. Dudley was one of those men who are always ready for any emergency; a small black leather travelling-bag contained all he wanted, even to a few pairs of handcuffs to adorn the wrists of those unhappy wretches for whose arrest he had a warrant.

"I always take my 'guide-books' with me," he said.

"Why do you call them 'guide-books'?" I, in my ignorance, demanded.

"Because they are meant for two wrists, otherwise tourists," he replied, with a smile.

I never remembered having seen Dudley in such excellent spirits; he was full of anecdote, and his conversational power was really admirable.

On arriving at the station we saw nothing of G. K., and I at once came to the conclusion that he had taken his departure by an earlier train, in order to throw anyone who might be in search of him off the scent.

"Not a bit of it," cried Dudley, when he heard my view of the case; "the man's here somewhere, but he has had recourse to another disguise. If you expected to see Mr. George Karlake here, your simplicity is amusing; he is much too clever a man to adopt one disguise for more than an hour or two together. We shall trap our fox at Abrams', or on board the steamer. If he slips through my fingers, I'll forgive him with all the pleasure in life."

Talking like this, we went to the bar to obtain some refreshment before we started.

"Yes," repeated Dudley, "if he escapes me, I'll forgive him. I have not been in the A Reserve all these years for nothing, as G. K. will find out."

It was undoubtedly imprudent of Dudley to speak so pointedly and distinctly in a public place, and he found out his mistake afterwards. His words were overheard by more than one individual. A young man dressed in a sailor's garb, and having a rough appearance, said—"I am sorry for G. K., whoever he may be. I don't think he stands much chance with you."

"You think in the right direction for once in your life," answered Dudley, good-humouredly.

"What do you want him for?" asked the sailor.

"I owe him some money, and feel desirous of paying him," said Dudley, winking at me.

"Oh! and what are you, if I may make so bold as to ask?"

"A sheep farmer, and more like a lamb myself than anything else."

"Are you going to Liverpool?"

"Oh dear, no; only a few miles down the line."

"Will you take a glass of something before you start?"

"Will you?" asked Dudley.

"I don't mind if I do."

"What shall it be?"

"A glass of mother-in-law—that's always my tap," said the sailor.

"What's that?" asked Dudley, rather puzzled.

"Why, old and bitter," replied the sailor, with a loud laugh, that would have made the welkin ring, if one of those rustic mysteries had been at hand.

"Oh! that's a chalk to you," exclaimed Dudley. "My friend and I will have the same. What's to pay?" he added.

"A leather-dresser," answered the sailor.

"You're getting beyond me again," said Dudley.

"Don't you understand?"

"No more than I did at first. What's a leather-dresser?"

"A tanner; in other words, a sixpence."

"Oh! then three glasses of mother-in-law cost a leather-dresser. I see. It appears that I'm learning something."

The sailor drank his beer, and said, "Will you have another, shipmate?"

"Not for me, thank you," replied Dudley.

"Then I'm off. Good-bye. Don't forget what I've taught you."

"Not in a hurry."

"That's right. I may teach you something else one of these days—that is to say, should we meet again."

Dudley stared after him, but did not understand the real signification of his words until some time afterwards.

"Don't forget G. K.," said the sailor, turning round at the entrance to the refreshment-room.

"Don't alarm yourself about that," said Dudley. Turning to me, he added, "That's a queer fish."

"Very much so," I replied. "Do you know what struck me while he was talking?"

"No."

"I fancied he was G. K. himself."

"By George! I wouldn't mind betting what he calls a leather-dresser you're right. Bless me! what a fool I must have been! I do believe I'm getting silly in my old age. Well, if it were Kitley, I will say that he is a plucky fellow; we shall have tough work with him."

"Are you not afraid that what you incautiously said before him may put him on his guard?"

"Not at all. He does not suppose for a moment that I have construed his telegram."

"I fancied he recognized me."

"It is not likely. I will stake my professional reputation that he is at Abrams' in less than an hour after the train reaches Liverpool."

"Keep your eye on the sailor," I suggested.

"My dear fellow," replied Dudley, "if Kitley and the sailor are the same, you may depend upon it that he has a dozen or more disguises; he will pop into some private place, and slip on a great coat and otherwise change his appearance. You will soon see if I am right; if I am, you will see no more of the sailor; that metamorphosis, for the present at least, is played out."

I looked in every carriage and watched the people on the platform, but I did not see anything of the sailor. Dudley was right, and I felt convinced that Gillian Kitley was travelling with us, and that he was moreover on his guard. During the long journey Dudley looked anxious and worried; his excellent spirits deserted him, and he seemed to be impregnated with some gloomy presentiment of coming evil. We arrived in Liverpool in due course, and finding that Dudley was still in a preoccupied mood, I attempted to rally him, but without success.

"I am afraid of something," he said, "but I cannot tell you what. I have a presentiment that something will happen to me within four-and-twenty hours."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, "you have the silly superstitious feeling of old women."

"You may ridicule me; I may be wrong, and you may right; let the future judge between us."

"That coming events cast their shadows before, I have heard," I replied; "the shadow of your event seems to be a particularly dark one."

"Never mind. Put speculation on one side; let us think of business. If I die in doing my duty, I shall be content."

Going to an inn near the station, we left our travelling-bags, and had some supper; then we proceeded to the chief police-station, and made our business known to the chief superintendent, who at once despatched a man to the *Isis*, to inquire which berth had been engaged by Abrams. He had further instructions—viz., to stay on board until the vessel was on the point of sailing; and if the individual we were in search of came to take possession of his berth, to arrest him, and bring him back to the shore.

Baltic Lane was a small thoroughfare chiefly inhabited by Jews. We heard that Mr. Abrams was in anything but savoury odour with the police, who regarded him as a receiver of stolen goods. They had never been able to bring the fact home to him, and were delighted at the prospect of inculping him in the Lombard Street robbery. If the plunder brought by Gillian Kitley was found in his house, there would be no loophole through which he could escape.

Dudley carried a revolver; it was an invariable practice of his. The possession of this dangerous weapon gave him confidence, and I must confess it somewhat reassured me.

"I feel that we have dangerous work on hand, Mortimer," he said to me. "Kitley is not only a clever but a desperate man. If he succeeds in eluding my vigilance to-night, he may do well in the New World; but if, on the other hand, I capture him, he will infallibly be doomed to fifteen or twenty years' penal servitude, and a man will do much for his liberty."

"To be sure he will; but of what need you be afraid?" I replied.

"I have a vague presentiment of coming danger."

"Nonsense, man!" I exclaimed; "shake off such enervating ideas."

We walked on in silence until we came to Baltic Lane. Mr. Abrams' house was ostensibly the abode of a dealer in marine stores; he bought property, old and new, of all descriptions; he lent money; he bought old gold; he was anything and everything, and was the most skilful old "fence" in the town. The shop was closed when we arrived, but a light in the parlour showed us that the Jew was up.

Dudley did not think it prudent to enter the house. Such a movement on his part would put both Abrams and Kitley on their guard. A man of resources like Abrams would no doubt have

hiding-places or doors at the back of his house, through which Kitley could escape if menaced. It was Dudley's opinion that Kitley would not be at the Jew's house at all. His object was to watch Abrams, and follow him wherever he went; so we stood on a doorstep opposite his house for three-quarters of an hour; at the expiration of that time our assiduity was rewarded. Abrams, who had been fully described to us, emerged from his dwelling, and muffled in a great coat and comforter, walked rapidly in the direction of the docks.

Taking me by the arm, Dudley said, "Come along; a sovereign to a bad penny, he is going to meet Kitley."

Since we left the metropolis a change had taken place in the weather. It was, as my friend expressed it, "two coats warmer." The wind had suddenly veered round to the south-west, and the air was almost spring-like in its balminess.

Abrams appeared well acquainted with the town. It was fortunate for Dudley that he had once been on duty in Liverpool for six months, so that his knowledge of the tortuous and winding streets in the neighbourhood of the docks was anything but circumscribed.

"Do you think Kitley will offer any resistance?" I said to Dudley.

"What unlimited faith you must have in human nature to ask such a question!" he replied, a little sarcastically.

"Will not your pistol terrify him?"

"If you mean to ask me whether he would choose imprisonment or death, I should say the former; death is final—there is no escape from it; but even the most miserable felon has his chance of a ticket-of-leave."

We had now entered a small, ill-looking street, in the centre of which on the right-hand side was a public-house; it rejoiced in the sign of the "Lively Shrimp." Mr. Abrams turned in here, and we as a matter of course followed. To the left was a parlour common to all. As the Jew flung the door open, Dudley and I caught sight of a face which we had no difficulty in recognizing as that of the sailor who had accosted us in the refreshment-room of the railway station. He was dressed in a precisely similar manner, and had been making fun with some of the real old salts, by whom the parlour of the Lively Shrimp was filled. We sat down in the parlour, and chose a position as near the conspirators as we conveniently could. Now and then we heard their conversation plainly, but at times the sailors, bent upon a carouse, would burst into a loud laugh, which drowned everything but the echo of their noisy cacchination. As we sat behind Kitley and Abrams, they were unaware of our proximity, and discoursed with the utmost freedom. Kitley handed Abrams a pocket-book, saying, "There are the notes; the gold is upstairs in a deal box, marked with the initials 'G. K.,' and labelled 'hardware.' Everything has

gone on well up to the present time, but I feel an inclination to stay here for a week or two."

"Will you not sail in the *Isis* to-night?" inquired Abrams, surprised.

"No; my intuitions tell me that the police are already on my track, and the first place they would go to would be your house, as you are known at Bremen's to be a friend of mine; the next place they would visit would be the dock in which the *Isis* is lying."

"Perhaps you are right," said Abrams.

"I am convinced that I take the most prudent view of the situation."

"I should feel less nervous if you were safely away."

"Oh!" said Gillian Kately, with a venomous smile, "do not be nervous on my account. Thank Heaven! I have an average amount of sense, and know how to make use of it."

"You know best, my friend," replied Abrams, "and you shall please yourself. If you do not sail in the *Isis* to-night, however, the deposit I paid on your passage-money is lost."

"And you would have me jeopardize my liberty for the sake of a paltry ten-pound note?" cried Kately, angrily.

"Money is money."

"If you are so narrow-minded, I regret having had anything to do with you. It is your penny-wise and pound-foolish people who never carry great enterprises through."

"Well, well," said the Jew, a little nettled, "we will not quarrel about nothing. Call for some more grog, and let us arrange our plan of action."

The waiter, in compliance with Kately's request, brought them tumblers of rum-and-water. Just as Kately was raising his glass to his lips, Dudley sprang up, and standing before him, exclaimed, in a tone of concentrated triumph and determination, "Gillian Kately, you are my prisoner!"

The consternation of the man was wonderful to witness, but it was only momentary. He became deadly pale. The tumbler fell from his trembling hand, and was shattered into fifty pieces upon the sanded floor.

"Your prisoner!" he cried, when he recovered himself; "never!"

I, in the interval, placed myself by the side of the Jew, and intimated to him that he must not attempt to escape, or the consequences would be anything but pleasant to him, should he be rash enough to defy the majesty of the law.

Gillian Kately's face wore a most demoniacal expression. He seemed at that moment to be capable of committing any atrocity. In the terrible dilemma in which he found himself, I feared he would not shrink from the crime of murder; nor was I mistaken.

"Resistance is useless; the house is surrounded by police,"

said Dudley. "You are bound to come, so you may as well come quietly."

All at once a snake-like calm came over Kitley; shrugging his shoulders, he replied, "You have been one too many for me, and I suppose I must admit it."

Dudley took a pair of handcuffs from his pocket. Kitley saw the irons gleam in the gaslight, and felt that a bold dash must be made, or the game was over. With a quick movement, almost amounting to the rapidity of legerdemain, he drew a bowie-knife from his breast, and without the slightest compunction plunged it to the shaft in Dudley's side. He uttered a cry, and fell bleeding to the floor. Abrams clapped his hands with delight. While I ran to my friend's assistance, Kitley walked coolly to the door, unmolested by anyone. The sailors were open-mouthed with astonishment, but not one attempted to stay the progress of the murderer who was leaving them red-handed. When he reached the door, Kitley exclaimed, "The fool rushed upon his fate. I warned him, and he would not take my admonition. Now he is paying the penalty of his rashness." With this he stalked into the night, and was swallowed up in the darkness without.

But retributive justice followed close at his heels. The landlord of the tavern no sooner comprehended what had taken place, than he recognized the fact that he would be blamed for making no effort to stop the murderer. Rushing into the street, he raised a hue-and-cry, by shouting "murder!" and "police!" at the top of his voice.

Alarmed by the furious outcry, Gillian Kitley increased his pace, and endeavoured to make his escape. Not being well acquainted with the locality, he soon became confused and lost his way. The night was dark; the lanterns of the watchmen glimmered occasionally like glow-worms.

To wander about the docks at night is extremely dangerous, because one gate may be shut while the other is open, consequently, the unwary traveller may be precipitated into the water, and there perish miserably.

Gillian Kitley's pockets were filled with gold. He carried a dead-weight of gold with him, which, oddly enough, ensured his destruction. Finding he had lost his way, he was retracing his steps, when he took a half-turn to the left, which brought him to a gate barring the entrance to a dock of large dimensions; he at once attempted to cross, but did not dream that the corresponding gate was open. He stumbled, fell forward—there was a plunge, and he sank into the seething water. Although an accomplished swimmer, the gold with which he was laden weighed him down, and he was soon suffocated. His body was not recovered until the next day, nor was his fate known until many hours after his death.

We must now return to the tavern. Abrams did not attempt to escape; he sat in a state of stupefaction, and made no sign.

Finding that Dudley was very seriously injured, I bound up the wound as well as I was able, and having staunched the blood, I had him conveyed to the hospital, where the doctors entertained but faint hope of his recovery. After hovering between life and death for more than a month, he began to improve, and finally got better, though for a long time he wore but the shadow of his former self.

Abrams was thrown into prison, and severely punished for being the accomplice of Gillian Kitley. The whole of the stolen property was recovered, and though the telegraph was "quicker than lightning," it proved the destruction in this instance, instead of the salvation, of a shrewd but wickedly unscrupulous man.

IV.—THE CLANDESTINE BRIDAL.

OF all the quiet, retired villages, Merryvale is the quietest and most retired. I speak with authority on the subject, because I lived there in the capacity of telegraph clerk for eighteen months. It was always a matter of surprise and wonder to me that Merryvale should indulge in the luxury of a telegraph station; but where there is a railway the electric machine is generally established. I cannot conscientiously say that I had much to do, or that I objected to the absence of hard work. I was, at that period of my life, particularly fond of reading, and I taxed the resources of the Merryvale circulating library to their utmost.

One of the most influential gentlemen in the neighbourhood of Merryvale was Mr. Crespigny Warner, whose daughter was the standing toast of these counties. Everyone who had the slightest pretension to good taste and discrimination bestowed unlimited admiration upon Kathleen Warner.

In a remote country village everybody knows everybody, and there is no such thing as privacy. We knew that Mr. Warner was endeavouring to force an objectionable match upon his lovely daughter, and that she, like a high-spirited girl as she was, resisted her father's tyranny in a determined manner, which anything but pleased him. Of course she had the sympathy of most of the Merryvalians, myself amongst the number.

John Blount, a young gentleman living with his father some little distance from Mr. Warner's house, was on very friendly terms with the family, and had, in the October preceding the

August in which charming month my story commences, brought down a friend, who, as a matter of course, no sooner saw Miss Kathleen Warner than he learnt to love her; the more he knew her, the more he appreciated her wondrous beauty and sterling moral worth. But his suit found little favour with Mr. Warner, for though an Oxford man and an accomplished gentleman, he was lamentably poor; his father had left him the inadequate income of one hundred and fifty pounds a-year, upon which Oliver Fenton did his best to exist.

The man Mr. Warner had selected for his daughter's husband was a Frenchman, calling himself the Count Soubise. He represented that he had vast estates in France, kept horses, and, in fact, seemed to have any amount of money.

Mr. Warner's father had been a cotton-spinner; his fortune was made in Manchester, and he was anything but an hereditary lord of the soil he occupied. When the Warners first came into the country, they were looked upon as *nouveaux riches*, and met with anything but a kind reception. Warner fancied that he should achieve a triumph over the landed aristocracy who now snubbed him, if he could make his charming daughter the Countess Soubise. He liked a title—your thoroughgoing Manchester man always likes a title—and to be able to talk of “my daughter, the Countess,” was anything but a negative advantage to a man like Warner, who, by those of Anglo-Norman blood, was openly talked of as the affluent tradesman.

Count Soubise took up his quarters at Alfreton Hall, Mr. Warner's country-seat, and was made the welcome and distinguished guest. All Mr. Warner's friends in the vicinity, and even some from Manchester and London, were asked down to meet the Count, who smiled placidly, not to say benignantly, at these honours which were thrust upon him, and said, that from the bottom of his heart he thanked his dear English friend and benefactor; then he would go to the jeweller's in the nearest market town, and purchase a handsome diamond bracelet, which he would send to Miss Warner with the respectful compliments of Count Soubise. The Count's manner was so gentle and unassuming, that the friends of Mr. Warner voted him a “perfect gentleman,” and congratulated Kathleen upon the advantageous match she was soon to make; but she sadly shook her head, and left the room to hide the tears which rose to her eyes and dimmed her vision.

When the Count was not present after dinner at Alfreton Hall, Mr. Warner, under the influence of his tawny port, was wont to exclaim, with some of the leaven of his early education, “I flatter myself I know a gentleman when I see him. The Count's a gentleman, sir, every inch of him, and he's the man for my money. If Kathleen don't see it now, she will some of these days.”

Although Oliver Fenton had been plainly told by Mr. Warner

that there was no hope for him in the contest with Count Soubise, the poor fellow was so passionately enamoured of Kathleen, that he was totally unable to stay away from the atmosphere in which she lived. He came down to Merryvale, and took lodgings over the circulating library, in which house I had a back-bedroom looking upon smiling meads and an undulating expanse of varied scenery. He dined nearly every day with his friend, John Blount, who, knowing the value of a richly-stored mind, cultivated his society, and found undiluted pleasure in the companionship of a worthy man, whose only fault was his poverty.

Kathleen Warner was an heiress. An uncle on her father's side had left her a large sum, which, during her minority, fructified in the hands of careful bankers, so that in a year's time she would, on attaining her majority, be entitled to the sum of thirty thousand pounds, which was an inducement to marriage that our friend the Count Soubise very probably had an eye to.

One morning Mr. Warner talked very seriously to his daughter. He told her he should insist upon being obeyed, and that she should have her own way no longer. He would give her no more than a fortnight; at the end of that time she should marry the Count.

She received this intimation tearfully, and declared, that if her father proceeded to the extremity he threatened, he would destroy her happiness for ever, and render her the most miserable creature that ever existed.

John Blount and Oliver Fenton held a council of war when this news reached them. They met at Fenton's apartments. Blount was going to shoot some pigeons, and he had his gun slung over his shoulder, while his favourite dogs accompanied him.

"So," he exclaimed, "you are not destined, it seems, to run in double harness, my boy. Old Warner has decided upon marrying his daughter to that French fellow who is always at the Hall, and for whom I have not only an unmitigated contempt, but a positive hatred."

"You need not ask me whether I share your antipathy or not," said Oliver Fenton.

"I should imagine that you regarded him with anything but Christian charity."

"You are right. But as we are on the horns of a dilemma, let us see what can be done."

"By all means," responded Blount. "You shall, in a few words, be made acquainted with my view of the case. I firmly believe that Kathleen knows you love her, and reciprocates your passion."

"She has always led me to believe so."

"That is good. Before her father drove her into a corner, I do not think anything would have induced her to rise in open rebellion to him; but now that he has shown himself an unreflecting tyrant, why, she will be inclined to do anything to escape the odious fate with which she is menaced."

"Is that your opinion?"

"It is."

"I hope you may be correct in your estimate of her character," said Fenton, feelingly.

"I am convinced I am. You forget that I am older than yourself, and have no slight knowledge of the world. I have studied women in almost every country, and have found them both impulsive and capricious. Now is your golden opportunity; lay siege to Miss Warner in a steady and deliberate manner."

"With what object in view?"

"Matrimony."

"How is it to be accomplished?"

"Be romantic for once in your life, and go in for a 'clandestine bridal.'"

"What is that?"

"Listen to me, and you shall hear. Wentworth—you know Wentworth, Mr. Warner's chaplain—is particularly intimate with me; we were at college together, and I obtained for him the position he now holds, which, although not very distinguished or splendidly lucrative, is yet worth having in the absence of better patronage. Wentworth will, if I ask him, marry you young people. The chapel, as you know, stands at some little distance from the Hall, and we should have no difficulty in carrying the ceremony through successfully."

Fenton jumped up gleefully, and shook his friend by the hand.

"You have suggested a most admirable way out of the difficulty," he exclaimed.

"I am glad you approve of it," said Blount, quietly. "You had better seek Miss Warner, and make her a decided offer. If she accepts you, it will then be easy to arrange your future plans. I will in the meantime talk to Wentworth."

"I have hitherto refrained from telling Kathleen that I love her," said Fenton, "because I would not let her think that I was mercenary. I wish to Heaven that she would not have that thirty thousand pounds in a year's time. If she were poorer than I, she would know that I was disinterested."

"Ah!" exclaimed John Blount, with a laugh, "you are a tyro in the ways of the world. You will be only too glad of the money you despise when Kathleen is your wife. In point of fact, if she had nothing, I would not encourage the match. Think of the poverty to which you would consign her. If you can barely keep yourself on a hundred and fifty pounds per annum, how could you hope to keep a wife, feed, clothe, and educate your children?"

"You have no right to talk to me like this," replied Fenton; "friendship has its limits, and you convince me that it is easy to overstep them."

"And you convince me, dear boy, that it is easy to be a goose," said John Blount, good-humouredly smiling at his friend's chagrin.

"I mean what I say," replied Oliver Fenton, still annoyed.

"So do I," said John Blount, laughing louder than ever; "and although I do not encourage it, I like the enthusiasm of youth, and admire it beyond measure. It is refreshing in the extreme to meet with it, more especially when one has been indulging in the society of the commercial plutocracy."

Fenton's anger vanished before his friend's genial manner.

"Make your mind perfectly easy; as far as my part of the matter goes," said Blount in continuation, "I will do all that I have undertaken to do, and more."

Fenton looked inquiringly at him.

"I will do all I can to find out something respecting our worthy Count's antecedents. I fancy he is a man with what novelists call a 'teeming past.' He looks as if he had his secrets."

"So he does."

"I know the proper way to set to work to unravel the tangled skein of his chequered history,—here, you will perceive, I am touching on the peculiar province of the novelist again."

"'Tangled skein of his chequered history' is not bad," said Fenton, with a laugh. "When you have collected materials for the task, you had better turn biographer, and write his life."

"That, sir, if I am not mistaken, will be fitting work for the Newgate chronicler," replied Blount, with dignity.

"Let us hope so," responded Oliver Fenton; "but I am not so sanguine as to such a result as you seem to be. Although I thoroughly detest the Count Soubise, I do not carry my prejudices to such an extent as you do."

"I know something of the French peerage, dear boy, and I have never heard of Soubise; I have moved in the best circles of Parisian society, and have never met Soubise; I have visited most of the provincial towns, and never heard mention of a Count Soubise."

"Let us be charitable. It is wrong to prejudge anyone."

"That remark proceeds from your ecclesiastical training," said Blount. "It is very pretty, but in these days it is necessary to be on one's guard; you never know who may be a *chevalier d'industrie* and who an honest man. Well, I must go and kill those pigeons I spoke to you about, or there will be no pies. Will you come with me, or shall I leave you here?"

"If I am not *de trop*, I shall be proud."

"On the contrary, it is I who shall be proud. Shoulder your gun, and come along."

Whistling to his dogs, John Blount led the way to the open air, and the two friends walked down the village High Street together, and presently turning sharply round to the left, they crossed a stile, and were soon lost to sight in the distance.

The next day, Mr. Blount came to the railway station, and sauntering into my office, exclaimed. "Good morning, Mr. Mortimer; are you very busy?"

"Not more so than usual, sir," I replied.

"That remark is voluminous in itself, and allows me some latitude," he said; "therefore I shall take the liberty of sitting down and dictating a message which I want you to send to France for me."

"Very well, sir; as I have not at present to report the crash of empires or the fall of worlds, I am at your service."

"So far, so good. 'Mr. John Blount, of Merryvale, to Mons. Jacques Henrade, of the Rue Tant-pis-et-Tant-pis, Paris.'"

I wrote the preliminary portion of the message down, and looking up, awaited further instructions.

"Are you acquainted with a Count Soubise? if so, telegraph all particulars respecting him."

"Is that all, sir?"

"Every word of it, my modern magician. How long before you will get an answer?"

"A couple of hours, if the wires are clear."

"*Eh bien!*" said Mr. John Blount; "allow me during that time to participate in the pleasure that a foaming tankard will, I know, confer upon you; let us go to the adjoining tavern, and while away the time by the aid of good tobacco and indifferent malt liquor."

Having nothing particular to do, I fell in with his proposition; and after having despatched the message to London, and left word where I could be found if my services were urgently required, I followed Mr. Blount to the public-house. We ensconced ourselves in a shady arbour covered with blushing roses and fragrant clematis, and drank the cooling draught the attendant Hebe brought us.

Knowing Blount to be a friend of Oliver Fenton, and being thoroughly well aware that the Count Soubise was Fenton's rival, I could fathom Blount's motive in sending the telegram. It was with some anxiety that I waited for the response.

I had not been twenty minutes at the inn before the station-boy came and told me the dial signalled a coming message. I was obliged to go in order to receive it, and left Mr. Blount where he was. Some time elapsed, and when he came to the office, I had the reply ready for him. It was not so satisfactory as he had anticipated.

"Well, what news?" he exclaimed on entering the office.

"The answer's come, sir. Shall I read it to you?"

"If you please."

"From Sebastian Leroy, chief superintendent of police, Rue de Tant-pis, to John Blount, Merryvale. Henrade on business in the provinces; will not return for ten days. Message shall be given when back."

"That is awkward," muttered Blount. "Well, after all, the delay it necessitates is not so very ruinous."

He went away soon afterwards, enjoining upon me the necessity of letting him know directly the message came in from Paris.

In the meantime, Fenton progressed most favourably with Miss Kathleen Warner; she not only accepted his offer, but agreed to marry him clandestinely.

Henry Wentworth, Blount's friend, fell in with his views, and made no objection to the bridal, in which he was ready to perform his part.

Seeking his idol, Oliver Fenton spoke to her in a secluded part of the garden attached to her father's house. She was dressed with a becoming simplicity, which set off the natural grace of her form; holding a rose in her hands, she plucked it to pieces, and cast the bruised petals on the ground. Starting as she recognized her lover, she said, in a silvery voice, "Oh! I am glad you have come. Not half an hour has elapsed since I was subjected to the most tiresome persecution on the part of that insufferable French person whom my father in his wisdom has thought fit to inflict upon me."

"I pity you from the bottom of my heart," said Oliver Fenton. "I trust, though, that your days of unhappiness and suspense are nearly over. Mr. Wentworth will procure a special licence from the bishop of his diocese, and we can be married in three days from this time in the old chapel."

Kathleen blushed until her cheek became the colour of the rose she held in her hand. "In three days?" she murmured.

"Yes, my darling; Wentworth will then have the licence. Shall I authorize him to make every preparation?"

"Yes," she replied, in so low a tone as to be scarcely audible.

"Bless you, my own—my own for ever and ever!" cried Fenton, raising her hand to his lips, and imprinting sweet kisses upon it.

"I know not," said Kathleen, "whether I am doing right or wrong. It grieves me to disobey my father, but I would rather die than espouse the Count Soubise. I have an invincible prejudice against him."

As she spoke a slight rustle was heard in a thicket of laurels.

"Did you hear a noise?" inquired Oliver Fenton.

He looked around him suspiciously.

"I fancied a rabbit or a weasel moved amongst the dead leaves," said Kathleen.

"Oh! was that all? It is arranged then, dearest, that we are to be married in the old chapel at twelve o'clock on Thursday night. When you are my wife, you can defy Soubise, and you need not dread the future. I have money enough for our mutual wants until you come of age. I can mortgage my income, or even borrow from Blount, who is devoted to my interests."

"It is arranged," answered Kathleen; "and I feel sure that in taking this step, hazardous as it may seem, I am going in the right direction—in that direction in which I must look for future

happiness. I trust in time the scales will fall from my father's eyes, and he will applaud rather than condemn my independent action."

The interview between the lovers lasted some little time longer. They parted, with happiness in their hearts and confidence in their future, little dreaming that the snake was moving in the grass. But so it was.

Count Soubise was concealed in a thicket, and had overheard every word that had fallen from their lips. With a smile of undisguised malignity he stole away, and sought Mr. Warner, to whom he communicated what he had heard.

Terrible was the wrath of the enraged father, who would at once have denounced his daughter, and upbraided her with her treachery, as he was pleased to denominate her conduct. He was, however, overruled by the Count Soubise, who persuaded him to allow his anger to slumber until the proper time for its explosion arrived. His counsel was to allow the lovers to make all their arrangements, and surprise them in the old chapel just as the ceremony was about to commence. With some reluctance, Mr. Warner consented to pursue this course.

Henry Wentworth obtained the licence, and everything went on, as was believed, most smoothly. A terrible thunder-clap was in store for the undutiful daughter and the man she dared to love.

On the night appointed, Wentworth was the first to steal down to the old chapel with the keys in his hand. He knew that it was not altogether creditable to him to preside at a clandestine bridal, but he was inclined to run the risk for the sake of his friends. Lighting the candles on the altar-piece, he waited in silence which was almost awful for the coming of the chief contracting parties.

In a few minutes John Blount, arm-in-arm with the bridegroom, appeared. Oliver Fenton was pale and careworn.

"Courage!" whispered Blount, and Fenton pressed his hand in reply, as a tacit assurance that he was prepared.

The chapel was partly in darkness, and that portion which was illuminated presented a ghastly and funereal appearance, which nothing could lighten or dispel. After a few words had been exchanged between the officiating priest and Mr. Blount, a gentle step was heard approaching the altar.

It was Kathleen. Her face wore a solemn look, but its expression changed to a softer one of love as she gazed affectionately in her lover's face. Her eyes were swollen, and she had to all appearance been lately weeping.

Blount placed Kathleen and Fenton facing one another; they stood hand-in-hand; then, by the meagre light, Henry Wentworth proceeded to read the forms appointed by the rubric. Hardly had he commenced before a noise was heard; the doors of the chapel were thrown open, and Mr. Warner, followed by Count Soubise and a number of servants, rushed in.

All was consternation and dismay.

"Undutiful girl!" cried Mr. Warner, seizing her rudely and roughly by the arm, "come home instantly. It is lucky that your father was sufficiently vigilant to defeat this infamous scheme, to the indulgence in which false friends have lured you for their own base purposes."

Kathleen covered her face with her hands and wept. Oliver Fenton's face flushed.

"It is to be regretted," continued Mr. Warner, "that in this country no law is to be found which will allow me to punish the miscreants as they deserve."

"If that remark applies to me, sir," cried Fenton, "I must call upon you to retract such intemperate language."

"I retract nothing," answered Warner, doggedly.

"The motive by which these people have been actuated," interposed the Count, coming forward, "is palpable enough; they know the young lady will have money, and they wish to divide the spoil between them."

"Mind what you say, sir!" vociferated John Blount.

"Oh, it is all true. I am not to be intimidated; there are domesticities behind to protect me."

"Have a care! Nothing but the sacred edifice in which we stand protects you."

"Violence we anticipated," said the Count, with oily accents, "and we are fully prepared."

"Come along, girl!" said Mr. Warner.

"Oh, father!" sobbed Kathleen.

"Come along, I say! I will not have you contaminated by further contact with these men."

"I deny your jurisdiction over the young lady," said Oliver Fenton.

"Oh, you do?" replied Mr. Warner, coolly and sarcastically. "Very well; I will at once have her made a ward in Chancery, and then you may call the jurisdiction of the Lord Chancellor in question."

"A ward in Chancery!"

"Yes; and when that is accomplished you will find midnight work of this sort dangerous; you may possibly object to kicking your heels in prison for a few months."

He endeavoured to drag Kathleen from the church, but she, apprehending violence, and being half stupified with fear and faint with the shock to which she had just been subjected, refused to move, but clung despairingly to the altar-rails.

"I really must beg of you, sir, to treat Miss Warner with more consideration," said Wentworth.

"Mind your own business, sir!" was the gracious reply.

"It is any man's business to protect a woman from ill-usage."

"Stuff and nonsense, sir!" shouted Mr. Warner. "One thing

I am certain of, and that is, that your business will be elsewhere after to-day, for I shall lose no time in sending you about your business, whatever it may chance to be."

"That, sir, is a remark which, if made by a gentleman, would cause me considerable annoyance; but as it springs from one who is so largely impregnated with the plebeian element, I am compelled to overlook it."

"Count!" said Mr. Warner.

"My dear sir, command me," replied Soubise.

"Assist me to take this refractory girl to her chamber. My malediction upon her! Here is a pretty scandal for the county!"

"With the utmost pleasure, sir," returned the Count.

But as he approached and laid his hand upon Kathleen's arm, herculean John Blount interposed, saying, "Stand back, man!"

"Not for you," answered the Count, who, though trembling, was afraid to withdraw, because his dignity and reputation for courage would be compromised.

Blount, however, cared for nothing, not even the holy place in which he was restrained him. Seizing Soubise in a vice-like grasp, he by a simple athletic trick cast him over his shoulder, and made him fall heavily in the aisle amongst the servants, who picked him up insensible and carried him into the house.

When Kathleen saw that the man she dreaded above all others was absent, she rose to her feet, and presenting her hand to her father, told him that she was ready to accompany him.

Father and daughter were followed by a melancholy trio. Wentworth was melancholy because he had received his *congè*; Oliver Fenton was downcast because he feared Kathleen would never be his; Blount was depressed at the ill-success of their scheme, but he smiled now and then when he thought of the punishment he had inflicted upon the Frenchman.

Kathleen was very carefully looked after, and not permitted to leave her chamber except under the charge of two old women, who were equal to all the arduous duties of a *duenna*. Oliver Fenton could not obtain a glimpse of her; he was even unable to convey a note into her hands. Mr. Warner acted with promptitude and decision; he at once engaged another chaplain, and made immediate arrangements for the marriage of his daughter with the Count Soubise. Fortunately for the lovers, the Count had received injuries from his fall which kept him in bed for a week, during which time the unhappy Kathleen was respited.

Fenton was beside himself with rage and mortification. Blount was the only one who was at all self-possessed. I, in conjunction with others, was soon made acquainted with what had taken place. The clandestine bridal was in everybody's mouth, and the county newspaper even went so far as to insert a paragraph about "an independent heiress."

I had almost forgotten Mr. Blount's telegram to the Rue Tant-

pis, but one day I was agreeably reminded of the fact by receiving a reply to it. Mons. Jacques Henrade had evidently returned from the provinces. Mr. Blount happened to come in at the time, and was delighted to hear of the reply, which was as follows:—

“From Mons. Jacques Henrade, Paris, to Mr. John Blount, Merryvale.—The Count Soubise is *soi-disant*. I happen to want him particularly. Be good enough to keep him in your neighbourhood for twenty-four hours, as I start for England immediately.”

“Hurrah!” was the involuntary exclamation of John Blount; “this will do the business effectually. They have stopped us once, we will see if we can’t return the compliment. It will be our faults if we do not try.”

“What is that, sir?” I asked, guessing what was passing in his mind, but simulating ignorance.

“I’ll tell you in a day or two, Mortimer,” he replied; “at present I must be off. Don’t say a word about this telegram to anyone who is likely to carry it to Soubise.”

“I will be as silent as the grave, sir,” was my answer. Thanking me, he walked away.

The plot began to thicken. He at once communicated with Fenton, whose spirits rose at least a hundred per cent.

“Who is this Jacques Henrade?” he asked.

“A man I happened to become acquainted with in Paris some years ago. I saved his life one night, when he was attacked by a gang of coiners, and, like a generous-hearted fellow as he is, he has never forgotten the obligation under which I laid him.”

“Still you do not tell me what he is,” urged Fenton.

“In plain English, he is an inspector of police. I call him my pocket Fouché. He knows everyone. His knowledge of the law-breaking classes is simply extraordinary, and shows that his memory is marvellously retentive.”

“Having your suspicions of the Count, I presume you thought Henrade could dissipate or confirm your doubts?”

“Precisely so.”

“Now, having heard your news, allow me to communicate mine,” said Oliver Fenton. “The Count, who is much better, is to be married to-morrow morning at twelve o’clock to Kathleen. I was nearly distracted until you came with your ‘balm in Gilead.’”

“Be perfectly easy, for I tell you that the marriage shall never take place,” replied John Blount.

An emphatic declaration, with John Blount, was equivalent to a prophecy which could not escape fulfilment. Picture a pale and trembling girl almost dragged into the church, like a lamb to the slaughter; by her side the Count, taciturn but confident, trying to look affectionate but failing lamentably. Supporting his daughter Mr. Crespigny Warner, whose outward demeanour, though calm and placid, was like the skin of the Russian which when scratched reveals the Tartar. Oliver Fenton hung about the outside of the

old chapel anxiously awaiting the appearance of Blount, who had gone to the railway-station to look out for Jacques Henrade. The anxiety of an eternity of suspense was compressed into those few minutes. Oliver Fenton knew that if any accident occurred to prevent the arrival of Henrade, his darling Kathleen would be wedded to a wretch for whom justice was already clamouring aloud with a hundred mouths. It is no exaggeration to say that he would rather have seen her dead than the wife of that man.

At length Blount and Henrade appeared. Oliver Fenton knew it was Henrade by his foreign appearance and his quick, restless grey eye, which seemed to comprehend and take in everything at a glance. "Quick!" he cried; "we may even now be too late."

They advanced quickly to the church door, at which stood a servant of Mr. Warner's.

"Can't enter, sir," said the servant.

"We must, my good fellow," exclaimed Blount.

"Against master's orders, sir, and as much as my place is worth to disobey them."

Taking him by his shoulders, John Blount sent him rolling amongst the tombstones. This was what he called the *argumentum ad hominem*, and, to tell the truth, he was rather fond of employing it.

On entering the church, Oliver Fenton heard the chaplain say—

"Will you take this woman to be your wedded wife?"

Obedying an irresistible impulse, Fenton exclaimed, "I will!"

All eyes were turned upon him. Mr. Warner became speechless with rage. Kathleen uttered a shriek which rang discordantly through the old chapel, which assuredly had never before witnessed so strange a scene. Oliver Fenton's presence, accompanied by that of Blount, re-assured Kathleen, who felt that help was at hand. She afterwards said that she felt like a prisoner reprieved at the foot of the scaffold. Victor Hugo's condemned man did not pass more wretched and awful hours than herself prior to the commencement of the distasteful ceremony, which she regarded with horror, such as it is the lot of few damsels to undergo.

Count Soubise's usually jocund face assumed a deadly pallor as he saw Jacques Henrade, who advanced towards him and exclaimed, "Ah! my playful Alphonse Garrè!—do we meet again, and under such auspicious circumstances?"

"Devil!" muttered the Count.

"If it pleases you, *mon enfant*, let it be so. I will assume the part of his Satanic majesty for your satisfaction; but I shall be a terrible master, and exact most implicit obedience. Come, let us go to the realms of—anything but bliss."

Count Soubise, or Alphonse Garrè, put his hand to his pocket. Blount noted the action, though it escaped Henrade.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Mr. Warner.

"It means, sir, that I am about to arrest a swindler and an im-

postor. I don't like to use harsh terms to an old friend, but your question compels me to speak plainly."

"An impostor!—the Count an impostor?"

"I regret to say so."

"Impossible!"

"He is a convict, and will once more make acquaintance with the charms of hard labour in conjunction with the galleys."

With a sudden movement the wretched man drew a knife from his pocket, and endeavoured to stab Jacques Henrade. Blount, however, was too quick for him, and a deliberate blow from the iron fist of this muscular Christian laid him gasping upon the tessellated pavement of the chapel.

Kathleen fainted in Oliver Fenton's arms, and Mr. Warner was too much perturbed to enter his protest against such a proceeding.

After a time the Frenchman was securely manacled, and then he cast such a viperish, tigerish look upon Henrade that even hardy John Blount's flesh began to creep.

"Oh!" said Jacques Henrade, who noticed the look of repulsion, "do not be alarmed. I have drawn his sting, and a dried snake is not more harmless than my esteemed and worthy friend, Alphonse Garré. Nay, dear Alphonse, do not scowl at me—you will give me a nightmare."

Finding that he had been saved from a great humiliation and disgrace, Mr. Warner acted like a sensible man, and gave his daughter to the man of her choice.

When Oliver Fenton again led her to the altar, it may be safely surmised that he did not have recourse to a clandestine bridal. I frequently see the happy pair, who look upon me, after John Blount, as mainly instrumental in securing their happiness; but it was a long time before I could induce them to allow me to publish this "Telegraph Secret."

V.—WORKING THE NEEDLE.

THIS is essentially a tale of a Secret Society. I have put the facts together in a collective form, though they only came to my knowledge at different times, and in a disconnected shape. For some years after the present Emperor of the French came to the throne, and consolidated his empire by the *coup-d'état* which has made him famous, the Carbonari in London plotted incessantly against

him. They hungered and thirsted after his blood, and blindly thought that by sacrificing him they would secure a happier future not only for France but for Italy. That this was a mistaken notion, it is not necessary for me to state; the course of events sufficiently proves that. When the exiles from their native land met together and dilated upon the wrongs of their country, they became maddened with insensate rage. The massacre of the Rue St. Honoré kindled a flame which nothing but the blood of the author of the butchery could quench. They read Hugo's satirical biography, "Napoleon the Little," with undisguised zest, and vowed vengeance upon the prisoner of Ham every day of their lives.

In a small street leading out of one of the principal thoroughfares in Soho—that paradise of discontented and exiled patriots, that quarter of Leicester Square in which the poverty-stricken braves luxuriated—was a broken-down dilapidated house, which afterwards became celebrated as the nursery of conspiracy. In this house five men were in the habit of meeting. Two were Englishmen, three were Frenchmen. Their names were John Proby, Nathaniel Simpson, Olivera Arnot, Edouard Maratin, and Dumont Guernan.

The two first were men of doubtful character. Their antecedents would not bear inspection, though it would be a waste of space to recapitulate them. They were in the habit of speculating in a small way on the Stock Exchange. Arnot, Maratin, and Guernan were desperate refugees, and belonged to a secret society, the members of which had pledged themselves individually to assassinate Louis Napoleon.

Proby and Simpson joined them, not because they had any particular hatred for the French Emperor, or cared very much about the future of France or Italy. They hoped to make a fortune, and in this way: if such an event as the assassination of Napoleon the Third took place, they knew that the funds and every description of stock would become fearfully depreciated in value on the Stock Exchange, and when the expedition which had the death of Napoleon for its object left England, they were prepared to make time-bargains for a fall in prices.

It was a cold, frosty night in the early part of the year. Arnot, Maratin, and Guernan were sitting in a room on the ground-floor of the house in Soho, and preparing some of those terrible weapons known as hand-grenades, the explosive power of which is fraught with so much danger to those against whom they are directed.

"Ha! ha!" cried Olivera Arnot, regarding a shell he had just finished with fatherly pleasure. "If this does not accomplish the death of a tyrant, there will be little strength in my right hand!"

Going to the table, Maratin filled a wineglass with brandy, and holding it aloft, exclaimed, "Well said, Arnot. Let us drink to the death of the tyrant!"

The three conspirators were not slow in responding to the toast, which they drank with genuine enthusiasm.

There was a short, sharp knock at the door.

"'Tis our English friends, Messieurs Simpson and Proby," said Dumont Guernan. "I will admit them. Be on your guard, however, should I be mistaken."

The men nodded their heads, and Guernan entered the passage, opening the door upon the chain.

"A glorious future!" said a voice without.

This was the password arranged upon between them, and when he heard it Guernan knew that he might safely admit the speaker and whoever he had with him.

Proby and Simpson were ushered into the apartment, which had the appearance of an arsenal.

"We have come to see how you are progressing," exclaimed Nathaniel Simpson.

"Excellently. All the bombs will be complete in another day and night," returned Olivera Arnot.

"And you?" said Dumont Guernan; "may we rely upon your part of the compact being performed?"

"You may," said Proby; "that is to say, if you refer to the pecuniary part of the programme."

"That is precisely what I do refer to."

"Very well. We have with us a sum of money which will enable one of you—say Edouard Maratin—to go to Paris, and make every inquiry requisite to the successful carrying out of our enterprise."

Edouard Maratin smiled. He approved of being singled out as the advance guard. This man was a fanatic, pure and simple.

"In a week, or whenever you telegraph that you are prepared, Arnot shall join you, and a few days afterwards we will despatch Guernan to bring up the rear."

"Admirably arranged!" said the three Frenchmen in a breath.

"I think," continued John Proby, "that the bombs had better be taken over in one lot. There will be less chance of detection. Let them be put in large cigar-boxes, and covered with tobacco; that will throw the custom-house officers off the scent; but, knowing that you gentlemen are fertile in resources, I will leave the arrangement of those details to you. In the meantime, here are five-and-twenty pounds."

Proby laid the money in gold upon the table, and carefully examined the shells which were already completed.

"You must at once telegraph to me," added Proby, "the success or the failure of your enterprise. Two will be sufficient to cast the shells; let the third be waiting to transmit the result to England. Let your message be concise but explicit. 'All is lost,' or 'All is gained,' will be amply sufficient."

"It shall be done as you recommend," replied Arnot. "When

in Paris, we will draw lots to see upon whom the duty of execution shall fall."

"Why not draw them here," said Proby, "and settle the matter out of hand?"

"I see no objection," responded Maratin.

Pieces of paper of unequal length were selected by Nathaniel Simpson and placed in his left hand, while his back was turned to the conspirators. It was arranged that those who drew the two longest pieces should be made the assassins, while the third telegraphed the news. The lot fell upon Edouard Maratin and Olivera Arnot, who accepted the task with fanatic glee. It was easy to perceive that Dumont Guernan was woefully disappointed, but he concealed his chagrin as well as he could.

"I have an amendment to propose," said Guernan. "It is impossible that we should fail. It will be best to send word to you half-an-hour before the attack is made, so that you may have ample time to sell your stock. Depend upon it, that as soon as the attempt is made, the telegraphic apparatus will be taxed to its utmost by a hundred people anxious to send the news all over Europe. Take the fact of our success for granted."

"Listen to me," said Edouard Maratin; "Guernan is right. We will succeed, or perish in the attempt!"

"In addition to what I have already had the honour to observe," continued Guernan, "I wish to say that when I was last in Paris, I formed an intimate acquaintance with a young woman who works the telegraph in the office in the Rue Lepelletier. She will allow me to manipulate, or, in the slang of the trade, 'work the needle.' I will at a certain hour, to be hereafter decided upon, take possession of this office, and transmit my own message, for I have already acquired the requisite skill. I should suggest that Mr. Proby, our good and worthy friend, who is one of the fathers of our just and holy cause, should make a similar acquaintance in London, acquire a knowledge of the art, and by a preconcerted arrangement we can correspond with one another as if we were side by side, and our secrets will be our own."

"Before or after the assassination?" asked Proby.

"Say the execution," cried Arnot, correcting him.

"It is the same thing."

"Certainly not. We are merely the agents of a higher power." The vehemence with which the man uttered this declaration convinced his hearers that he fully believed the monstrous delusion. "Yes," he added, sententiously, "when a man becomes intoxicated with the blood of the people over whom he has usurped the dominion, he proceeds to the perpetration of excesses which call down Divine vengeance upon his devoted head."

The discussion was prolonged until a late hour, when the conspirators separated.

Proby liked Dumont Guernan's advice so well, that he promptly

looked out for a man in the employ of an International Telegraph Office, with whom he could place himself upon friendly terms. Oddly enough, he selected me. He waited about the office until work for the day was over, and the night hands were arriving, and met me coming out. Without hesitation he accosted me, and said that he wished particularly to acquire a practical knowledge of Telegraphy, and offered me a handsome sum if I would, during my leisure moments, instruct him. The office in which I was then employed was situated in Birchin Lane, and so extensive was our business, that I had very little spare time on my hands. The money bait he threw out was, however, so tempting that I could not refuse him; and being, as the head of the office, to a certain extent irresponsible to anyone but the secretary, manager, and directors of the Company, I told him he might come at five o'clock every day, of which permission he did not scruple to avail himself. His aptitude at learning the art was astonishing, and he could soon send a message as well as some who had been months in the office; but he threw himself heart and soul into it, which made all the difference.

One day he said, "I find I have a friend in Paris who is engaged in the same occupation as myself. We shall be able to talk to one another by the aid of this valuable invention, which I cannot praise too much."

"That is an advantage, sir," I replied, "and will help you considerably in your study."

I afterwards discovered that he had informed Guernan of his success with me, and that the Frenchman used to go every afternoon at five o'clock to the office in the Rue Lepelletier, and if the wires were free, correspond with Mr. John Proby.

There was one thing, however, which Mr. John Proby totally forgot, and that was, that although I might be a considerable distance from the dial, I could by constant practice read every word that appeared upon its eloquent surface, as clearly as if I had been perusing the freshly-printed pages of a book. On one occasion, I saw Mr. Proby, highly respectable old gentleman as I thought him, sit down before the dial. He handed me a cigar, and said, "Blow a cloud, Mr. Mortimer. It is excellent tobacco, I assure you."

I took the cigar, saying something about smoking being against the rules, and keeping it until I left.

Seizing the handle, he flashed a few words along the wires, and waited for an answer. It was not long in coming, his friend was "working the needle." I had my back to him at the time, but the dial was reflected in a glass which stood over the mantel-piece. Actuated by a purposeless curiosity, I looked carefully at the reflection of the dial, and watched the needle as it revolved to and fro. To my surprise, I read:—"The Emperor visits the opera to-morrow night at eight. We should have selected that hour and opportunity,

had we not considered that it would be utterly useless to you; so we have postponed the attempt until the next day, when we have reliable authority that he will walk in the Tuileries gardens at twelve o'clock. Between that hour and one, another tyrant will be obliterated from the list of the oppressors of men. You shall hear more to-morrow at this hour; I cannot speak further now, as the wire is required. Remember—twelve o'clock, the day after to-morrow."

He sent a brief reply, and smilingly rose from his seat.

"I will not take your time up any longer to-day, Mr. Mortimer," he exclaimed, smilingly, "as I have an engagement in Lombard Street at a half after five, but you will see me as usual to-morrow."

"Very well, sir," I replied. It was with great difficulty that I contrived to restrain my indignant anger. "The scoundrel!" I thought to myself, "the unscrupulous old villain! I never was so deceived in my life."

Our manager, a keen, far-sighted man of the world, was upstairs in the board-room, and I determined to lay the matter before him without any reserve, and be guided entirely by his judgment. Mine was indeed a responsible situation. The fate of a mighty empire might truly be said to rest in my hands!

Mr. Marston, the manager, was very busy when I entered, and exclaimed, "Well, Mortimer, what now?"

"If you please, sir, I wish a few moments' private conversation with you."

"I should be obliged if you will postpone it till to-morrow. I am just arranging the days on which the Directors are to serve upon the rota."

"My business, sir, will not brook a moment's delay."

"Is it, then, of such pressing importance?"

"It is of the utmost urgency," I replied.

"Come, here, then," said Mr. Marston, kindly; "take a seat by my side, and unfold your tale."

With bated breath he listened to my narration, and starting up, exclaimed, "By Jove, Mortimer, yours is wonderful news! The purpose of the ruffians is plain enough—to assassinate the only man who at present is able to adjust the balance of power in Europe. His death would be a universal calamity. The infamous scoundrels! Well, we shall bring them to justice, that is one comfort."

"What will you do, sir?"

"Write letters, and summon an extraordinary meeting of the Board early to-morrow morning, and place the matter in the hands of the Directors."

"Precisely so. I should suggest that Mr. Proby, as he calls himself, be arrested to-morrow."

"No, that would be too precipitate. You and I will, if the Directors sanction the project, start for Paris to-morrow night, and do our best to annihilate these hell-hounds!"

The letters were written and dispatched; the Board met, and were astounded at the information we laid before them. The London police arranged to look after Mr. Proby and whatever accomplices he might have in the metropolis; and we—that is, Marston and I—proceeded to Paris to communicate with the Parisian detectives, who had no difficulty in laying their hands upon Messieurs Arnot, Maratin, and Guernan, who were tried and found guilty, and are now languishing in a prison at Cayenne.

Nathaniel Simpson and John Proby have also just cause to regret “working the needle,” for they may be seen any day by the curious in such matters, hewing wood and drawing water on that sterile tract of land which is known to malefactors and others as Portland Island.

It may be imagined that I was handsomely rewarded for my fortunate discovery; but I was always extremely careful afterwards how I allowed old gentlemen having an ultra-respectable appearance to take practical lessons in Telegraphy, and “work the needle.”

VI.—FORGING THE WILL.

I BELIEVE Northampton is chiefly celebrated for its extensive boot and shoe trade; but while I was residing in the town, it became notorious through a singular will case, the clue to which was discovered mainly through the instrumentality of the electric telegraph.

Mr. Joshua Maitland was a retired tradesman, possessing great wealth; he had been a grocer and Italian warehouseman. Having sold his business, he built himself a house in the middle of a piece of land he purchased, and lived there with his only daughter, a pretty girl seventeen years of age, who was looked upon by all as the most probable inheritor of all her father's property.

Mr. Maitland had his house managed by a very worthy elderly couple, who respectively filled the offices of butler and house-keeper. Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Garrison professed unbounded respect and veneration for Mr. Maitland, and some discerning people went so far as to say that they overdid their parts. Alice Maitland was too young and pure and innocent to suspect anyone, and she believed the Garrisons to be the most respectable and sincere couple in the world. Certain it is, that they did all they could to serve her in a particular way.

There happened to be a cousin of Alice Maitland's, whom old Mr. Joshua most thoroughly disliked and detested; not that anything could be urged to the young man's discredit, but Mr. Maitland had been badly treated years before by Henry Baring's father, and the sight of the son revived old prejudices, and ripped open old wounds that time should have cicatrised, if not healed.

Henry Baring had the unheard-of audacity to fall in love with Alice Maitland, and went so far as to ask her father's consent to the match, whereat he flew in a tremendous passion, which nearly brought on an attack of apoplexy, and forbade the sighing Romeo to enter his house again. Seeking his daughter, he declared, with an oath, that if she married Baring he would disinherit her, and that then she might shift for herself.

The Garrisons were in the habit of talking confidentially to Alice respecting the hardheartedness of her father.

"Why, my dear, your father should take such an unconquerable dislike to Mr. Baring, I can't conceive," said Mrs. Garrison on one occasion.

This was the text of all her discourses. A drop of water falling continuously upon the hardest block of stone will, in the course of time, wear a hole in it, and it is easy for people of mature age to make an impression on young and susceptible people by perpetually dinning the same tale into their ears.

"Do you think papa will ever change his mind?" Alice would ask.

"I should think he would," Mrs. Garrison would answer, "when you are married, to be sure. But, lor! how stupid I am to talk to you like that, and how he would storm and rage at me if he heard me talking like that to you!"

"Never mind, dear Mrs. Garrison; I know you are my friend," Alice said, almost fearfully.

"You may swear to *that*, my dear young lady."

"What would you advise me to do?"

"It is not for me to take such a liberty as to advise you."

"Why not?"

"I might lose my place if your father heard me."

"I will never breathe a syllable. All I want is some one to tell me what to do, for poor Harry loves me so."

"If you will promise not to tell your father."

"Yes, yes."

"And not to say a word to a living soul, not even Mr. Baring."

"I promise."

"Very well, then. Come nearer, and listen to me," said Mrs. Garrison. "I should marry him the first time he asks me."

"And papa?"

"Say nothing to him."

"Nothing!" cried Alice.

"Not a word until it is all over; then go to him, and if he don't

forgive you and make it all right, I'm very much mistaken—that's all."

"Do you think that will be the wisest course?"

"I am positive it will," rejoined Mrs. Garrison. "But don't do it just because I tell you to, my dear; turn it over in your mind, and hear what Mr. Baring has to say to you. He is a nice, handsome gentleman enough, and anyone might be proud of him for a son-in-law."

"So they might, dear Mrs. Garrison; and do you really think him a fine fellow?"

"Don't I! Ask Mr. Garrison how I speak of him. I do believe Matthew would be jealous if we weren't such old friends."

Alice laughed heartily at the idea of the butler being jealous of Henry Baring—of *her* Henry Baring, too!

"The fact is, my dear young lady," continued Mrs. Garrison, "old men get crotchety. Your father is old, and he has his crotchets. Show him you have a will of your own, and I'll lay my life he'll admire your spirit. But while I am standing here talking to you, naughty puss that you are, the time is slipping away, and I am neglecting all my work. Good-bye, good-bye. I can't chatter any more till to-morrow."

So saying, Mrs. Garrison, with a kindly smile on her lips, shuffled away to attend to her work.

"A dear, good-hearted, kind old creature as ever lived!" was Alice Maitland's mental exclamation as the housekeeper disappeared. "I'll think over what she said. Heigho! what a thing it is to have a lover, and like him almost as much as he likes you."

With a demure look and a heavy sigh the young maiden entered the garden, and began to gather flowers, to make a nosegay to adorn the dinner-table.

Somewhat later in the day, Henry Baring met Matthew Garrison in a shop, and they walked a little way together.

"Well, Mr. Garrison," said Baring, "how is your young mistress to-day?"

"Just about the same as usual, sir."

"Did she send any message to me?"

"Not that I am aware of, sir—at least, she did not make me her messenger. Dear me! what a pity it is master should have such a spite against you. Miss Alice and you seem cut out by nature for one another, and I'm certain a better-matched couple couldn't be found in or out of Nottingham."

"Thank you, Garrison, for your good wishes; but I must warn you, that I am impervious to flattery," said the young man, with a heightened colour.

They walked on a little while in silence.

"I wish, sir, I could speak my mind to you."

"You may do so."

"I am rather cautious in what I say, because if my words were

repeated to master, I should be discharged, and my place is my bread."

"Quite so. You may, however, rely upon my secrecy."

"That is all I want, sir. Well, this is what I was going to say. It is a cruel and crying shame that two young people so well fitted for one another as Miss Alice and yourself should be kept asunder by what is nothing less than the caprice of an old gentleman."

"I wish you could alter the caprice."

"You may, sir."

"How?"

"By taking the bull by the horns."

"And in what way, pray, is that daring operation to be accomplished?"

"Ask Miss Alice, sir, to marry you, without any further delay; and when she says yes, as she will, take her to church, and make her your wife. When Mr. Joshua sees that he can't help it, he will make the best of a bad job, and reconcile himself to you as a son-in-law."

"He does not object to me personally," said Henry Baring; "he merely keeps up a silly prejudice he had against my father, which is visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children with a vengeance! You know, Garrison, that I love Miss Maitland most passionately, and I will make as good a husband as she is likely to find."

"She knows that, sir, and so I believe does Mr. Joshua himself."

"I hope so."

"Take my advice, sir," exclaimed Garrison, "and do as I tell you."

"I'll see about it. In the meantime, accept my thanks for your friendly counsel."

"You're welcome to that, sir, in any quantities, if it is of use to you. If you should wish to see Miss Alice at any time, I can always tell her you are in the garden; and now, good-bye, sir; we had better not be seen too much together."

Henry Baring was deeply impressed by what had fallen from the butler's lips, and was much inclined to act upon the disinterested advice he had given him. But was it disinterested? What reason had he to suppose the contrary? It will be remembered, however, by the intelligent reader that Mr. and Mrs. Garrison were playing into one another's hands in a very singular manner; they appeared to have the same end in view. A very remarkable conversation took place between Mr. Joshua Maitland and his butler that very afternoon.

Said Mr. Maitland dryly, "Matthew, I am going to consult you upon a little matter of business."

"Yes, sir."

"If you were in my place, what would you do with those young people?"

"Which young people, sir?" asked Matthew, pretending to be ignorant, but knowing perfectly well to whom the remark applied.

"Why, Miss Alice and her flame, Harry Baring."

"What would I do, sir?"

"Yes."

"Don't you think they are too young to marry, and that Miss Maitland, with her prospects, might do so much better?"

"Ah! that's where it is; she is throwing herself away. Is that what you mean, Matthew?"

"That's it, sir."

"H'm!" ejaculated Mr. Maitland, reflectively.

"It's not for me, sir, to make a remark," began Matthew Garrison, humbly.

"Yes, it is," cried Mr. Maitland, sharply.

"Then I should say, sir, let them wait a year or two, and see what turns up in the meantime."

"Good advice. Couldn't be better," said Joshua Maitland, smiling approvingly.

"She's very young, sir."

"So she is."

"And mayn't know her own mind."

"Very true."

"So there's no harm in waiting."

"Not a bit. I felt a little softened towards them to-day; they've been so obedient, and taken my ill-temper with such a good grace. If they had flown in my face, and dared to marry against my will and without my consent, why, they should have starved; not a penny of mine should they have had—oh, no!"

When Mr. Maitland said a thing, there was no doubt that he meant it; he was a man of iron will, and kept his word at all risks and all hazards.

It is hard to war against one's own kith and kin, but Joshua Maitland could do it. It is difficult to shut one's heart against the passionate pleadings of an only child, but Joshua Maitland was capable of doing so. It is hard to spend the latter years of one's life unloved and alone, but Joshua Maitland, when his pride and his word were in question, did not fear solitude.

The young people made up their minds to marry. It would have been far better for them had they not done so. They little knew the stormy nature of the sea upon which they were heedlessly venturing. Henry Baring consoled himself with the idea that many men who had achieved distinction in after life had married young. Poverty, though it weighed heavily upon them, did not prevent them rising in the world. It was even alleged, that a warm-hearted and judicious helpmate, with the little prattlers at her knee, was an incentive to exertion.

It could not be wrong to marry, argued Alice, when so experienced a man as Garrison, who was so well acquainted with her

father's idiosyncrasies, recommended such a step; and if Garrison and his wife were not her friends, she had none in the wide world.

Henry Baring and Alice became man and wife; and when the irrevocable step was taken, they sought Mr. Maitland, and in a confused and bashful manner made him aware of the fact. His rage was awful to witness; he even went so far as to curse his daughter, which so frightened the little innocent, that she fell on her knees and begged his forgiveness, but he spurned her from him with his foot.

This treatment of his wife roused Henry Baring's pride. Drawing his darling towards him, and letting her hide her face upon his breast, he turned fiercely, like a stag at bay, upon Mr. Maitland.

"If you forget, sir, that this young lady is your daughter," he exclaimed, "I do not forget that she is my wife."

"I at once and for ever sever all ties of kindred," replied Mr. Maitland. "I wish to forget that she was ever related to me."

"Do so, by all means. You have a right to act as you please; but if you are unable to conduct yourself as a father, you should at least behave like a gentleman."

This speech only served to inflame Joshua Maitland's anger to a higher pitch, and he drove the young couple out of his house, amidst renewed imprecations.

Time passed on. Henry Baring's pay as a clerk in a bank was barely sufficient for the maintenance of his wife and himself, but for a year they struggled on bravely, and then a child was born. When Mr. Maitland heard of the advent into the world of the infant, he sent his solicitor to say that he would allow his headstrong and refractory daughter a couple of pounds a-week, and with this increase of income they got along gaily.

I frequently met Mr. and Mrs. Baring out walking, and being well acquainted with their history, always pitied them from the bottom of my heart; but they looked happy, and I fancied they would in a short time enjoy all Mr. Maitland's property, for the old man had no one else to leave it to, and it was easy to see that he was breaking up fast, and not long for the land of the living.

At length the peremptory notice which no mortal can disregard was given to Joshua Maitland—an apoplectic stroke laid him upon a bed of sickness. Alice flew to his side, and nursed him tenderly; but though he recognized her, he was unable to speak. Shortly afterwards death released him from his sufferings.

Speculation was rife in the town to know what Joshua Maitland had done with the hundred thousand pounds he was popularly supposed to possess. The family solicitor announced that he had no will in his custody, and Alice was hailed as an heiress, which gave undisguised pleasure to everybody.

The day after the old man's death, however, Mr. and Mrs. Garrison called upon the solicitor, a Mr. Sparkall, and produced a will

to which was attached the signature of Joshua Maitland. Every line was regularly executed and delicately traced. It was the old man's signature to a nicety. And now for the provisions of this will.

By virtue of this testamentary document, he gave all he was seised of at the date of his death to Matthew Garrison and his wife, in return for the undivided attention he had received at their hands for many years. There was a charge upon the estate of the £2 a-week he allowed his daughter, and this sum was to be continued during her life. He stated at some length his reason for disinheriting his daughter, which was, of course, the old story of her disobedience, in marrying a man whom he disliked and had forbidden the house.

So far so good. All was straightforward, and apparently in good faith. There were one or two weak points about the will, though—notably, the body of it being in Matthew Garrison's handwriting. Matthew declared that he wrote at his master's dictation, and there was nothing very improbable in this assertion. Again, the will was witnessed by Garrison and his wife; it was, to say the least of it, odd that no third party should have been called in. Mr. Sparkall only lived a few doors off, and Mr. Maitland was known to have the utmost confidence in the legal acumen and moral worth of that gentleman.

People went about shaking their heads, and saying that the will was a forgery. Mr. Sparkall took counsels' opinion about the matter, but the opinion was anything but satisfactory, and strongly discountenanced any legal proceedings to set aside the will, as the Court of Probate would be most likely to support and uphold it.

Still the people talked, and shook their heads more gravely, until Matthew Garrison brought an action against a prominent tradesman, and recovered heavy damages. This decisive conduct silenced people; but though they talked less, they thought the more.

His sudden accession to wealth unsettled Garrison. He paid frequent visits to London, and neglected his wife, who grew nervous at being left alone in the house in which her former master had lived and died. Mrs. Garrison put up with his neglect for some time, but at length solitude became intolerable to her. Being on friendly terms with Matthew, I occasionally looked in during his absence. One evening I called as usual, not because I liked the people, but to see if I could gather any news which would be advantageous to Mrs. Baring, whom I regarded as despoiled of her inheritance by some mysterious jugglery. She looked very ill and haggard. I must mention, that amongst her accomplishments, which were not numerous, Mrs. Garrison did not number a knowledge of the art of writing. I had on former occasions been applied to to write her letters, and therefore was not in the least

surprised when she asked me to scribble a few lines to her husband, then stopping and luxuriating at a colossal hotel in a fashionable part of the metropolis.

"Tell him," she said, "that he must come back or send for me. I'm getting that nervous I can't sleep at night, and I'm beginning to see ghostes."

"What?" I exclaimed.

"Ghostes," she replied.

"Oh! I understand. You see ghosts at night."

"That's it."

"Anything else?" I asked, having written about the supernatural appearances.

"Say it's 'his' ghost."

"Whose?"

"He'll know—underline 'his'—and if some alteration isn't made, I shall go stark, staring, raving mad, and then he must take the consequences."

Having completed the letter, I posted it, and forgot all about the matter. The next day it was recalled to my mind by the appearance of Mrs. Garrison at the railway-station. Coming into my office, she sank into a chair, saying—

"Oh! Mr. Mortimer—I'm so bad."

"What's the matter now?" I asked.

"Why, the sperits have been worriting my life out, and there's no answer from my wretch of a husband."

"You will probably have one to-morrow. Sufficient time has not elapsed yet."

"I can't wait. Won't the telegraph go quicker?"

"Of course it will. Let me see—your husband is staying at the Great Western Hotel. Consequently, he will get your message almost immediately."

"Oh! what a blessed invention! Get up the steam, or whatever sends the words along, if you please, and tell Matthew I must come up to town if he doesn't return at once."

I sent the message, and, as luck would have it, Mr. Garrison was having his lunch at the hotel, and he sent word to the effect, that he was too much engaged to be troubled with his wife, and that she must mind her own business. This cavalier treatment angered her,

"The cold, calculating wretch!" she said. "Tell him I'll split."

"About what?" I asked.

"Never you mind. Send that, word for word."

I did so. Mr. Garrison did not appear to be much concerned at what evidently was a threat. He replied in a coarse strain, which had the effect of infuriating his wife beyond the power of endurance.

"Split, and be hanged to you!" was his answer.

"Oh!" she cried when I read it to her, "what a heartless brute!"

It is he, though, who is more likely to be hanged than I. What shall I do?"

My suspicions were aroused by her singular manner, and I resolved, in order to get at the truth, to have recourse to a little stratagem. Going to the machine, I said—

"There is another message for you from your husband, Mrs. Garrison."

"Indeed!" said she.

"Yes. He says that he doesn't care what you do. He starts in half-an-hour for the Continent, with all his ready money. You may have the house and furniture down here, but you must never hope to see him again. He has heard enough about the will in Nottingham, and he is going where no one will know his antecedents."

"Then my mind's made up; I'll stop him!" shouted Mrs. Garrison. "He shan't go abroad without me. Oh, no! He's played with and made a fool of me long ago, but he does not do it any more. The worm will turn when trampled on. Where are the police? I will denounce him! It shall no longer be a secret. My life has been a burden and a misery to me ever since Mr. Joshua died. Call in the police!"

I called in the railway policeman, the booking-clerk, the station-master, and a porter, and in their presence Mrs. Garrison declared the will by which her husband took possession of Mr. Maitland's property to be a rank and impudent forgery. Having induced her to commit herself so far, we took her to the police-station, where she repeated her statement on oath.

"Don't let him escape!" she cried; "arrest him at once, before he can reach the Continent. Go without me, indeed! I'll teach him better than that."

I smiled inwardly at the success of my stratagem, which was more successful than I had hoped. The designing couple, who had overreached themselves, were properly punished for their crime. Matthew died in prison, and his wife in a workhouse. Henry Baring and his much-enduring wife became prominent amongst the best and worthiest citizens, and the poor of the town have ever had occasion to bless their unexpected accession to wealth.

VII.—A MURDERER AT LARGE.

ELIAS SYDMONTON was a wool-merchant in a very large way of business. No one robbed the sheep of their winter clothing to a greater extent than he did; and yet, so unblushing was his effrontery, that he had not the slightest objection to look a sheep in the face, and was an ardent admirer of mutton.

Like many other merchants in the city of London, he had literally risen from nothing. He was a married man, and to that fact he was in the habit of attributing his prosperity. His marriage was blessed with two children, both boys; and these, as soon as they were old enough to quit the Blue-coat School, he introduced to the business, in order to give them a course of practical instruction, and qualify them to be woolstaplers.

Elias Sydmonton was proud of being a man of the people, and was wont after dinner, over a glass of tawny port, to inform his guests that he was the architect of his own fortune, and had no one but himself to thank for his success in life.

Those who have any experience of city and mercantile life know very well that even the greatest houses may topple to their ruin, during a period of monetary panic and general convulsion. When Elias Sydmonton's prosperity was at its height, the waves of a sea of terror flooded the City. Well-known names graced the columns of the *Gazette*, and men looked tremblingly at one another, wondering who would be the next victim of the insatiable demon, whose maw threatened never to be glutted, and whom nothing but a holocaust would appease. The house of Sydmonton and Sons, as it was called, found it impossible to meet its engagements. It was confidently believed that bankruptcy was inevitable, owing to the quantity of foreign bills which were in the market, and which would shortly be presented.

So low had Sydmonton's credit sunk, that his acceptances were openly offered for sale at a depreciation of sixty per cent., and in some instances eagerly bought up at that price. If Sydmonton could meet his foreign obligations, then he would be able to—in City phrase—stand the racket; if not, he must go to the wall.

This was the state of affairs on the 20th of April. On the 1st of May the bills were presentable; ten days intervened between the unfortunate man and ruin. Nothing but a miracle could save him, and Heaven seldom works miracles now-a-days for purblind mortals. There was little chance of his foreign creditors showing him any mercy; they were sorely pressed themselves; they were, in the majority of cases, poor and ravenous for money. So, on the 25th of April, Elias Sydmonton with a heavy

heart took the train from Bishopsgate Station, and went to his charming retreat near Broxbourne in Hertfordshire, which he had named Marble Hill. He had bought an old ancestral estate from a patrician family sadly reduced in circumstances, and compelled to go to Brussels to study French and economy. Having a hatred of aristocracy and all appertaining to it (many self-made men have, we may observe, *par parenthese*), he pulled down the old house—it had seen three centuries and a half—and built a new one replete with stucco and ill-placed gothic towers. The soil he did not consider desecrated by aristocratic feet, and if he had so thought it, he would have found it impossible to alter it. So he allowed the ground to remain unploughed, and the trees unfelled, but he changed the name of the estate from Norman Hall to Marble Hill; though the latter title was selected on the *lucus à non* principle, for there was not a block of marble within a hundred miles or more of it, and the country being a rich flat, there was not the semblance of a hill.

His amiable wife received him with smiles, though her heart was heavily laden with apprehension and sorrow. She was intimately acquainted with her husband's affairs, and she dreaded the worst.

At six o'clock that evening, I transmitted the following telegram from Mr. Sydmonton's confidential clerk to Marble Hill:—"From Matthew Tabernacle to Elias Sydmonton.—A gentleman of the name of Vellac has arrived from France, and wishes to see you on business of the last importance. Shall I send him to you at Marble Hill? He will not communicate with me."

I flashed this brief message along the wires, and in a short time the reply arrived. I have always looked upon Telegraphy as more or less a game of question and answer, and taken interest in it accordingly. Mr. Sydmonton telegraphed in four words—"Send Vellac down immediately."

An hour later M. Vellac arrived at Marble Hill, where he was received with the utmost affability and courtesy by Mr. and Mrs. Sydmonton. Expressing a wish to speak privately, the lady withdrew, accompanied by her sons, and the English merchant and the foreigner were alone together.

Sydmonton was the *beau ideal* of a bluff Englishman. His frame was large, but not overburdened with flesh; his manner frank, honest, and straightforward. He said what he meant, and meant what he said.

The Frenchman was the exact opposite. He was thin and tall; his eyes were snake-like, restless, and full of cunning; his manner was persuasive; he overwhelmed one with unctuous conversation, after the manner of a boa-constrictor, who salivates his victim to be able to swallow him with greater ease. In a word, he was as astute as the fiend, and as wicked as Cain. His attire was in good, if not in perfect, taste; he wore a massive watch and a heavy chain, a

diamond of price sparkled on his finger, and he had the outward appearance of wealth, if he did not possess the reality.

All the delicacies of the season which a fastidious fruiterer could supply were upon the table. Wine of an excellent vintage pleased the eye and tickled the palate. In various parts of the room magnificent bronzes were displayed; valuable paintings hung on the wall; a Canaletti jostled a Titian, and a florid Cuyp looked down upon a stately Joshua Reynolds.

M. Vellac glanced at all these evidences of wealth, luxury, and refinement, with the eye of a creditor who has a regard for assets. Sydmonton was not personally acquainted with his visitor, though he fancied he had his name upon his books.

"Pray make yourself at home, sir," he exclaimed; "I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance, but I have no doubt that we have had dealings together."

"No, Mr. Sydmonton," returned the Frenchman, with a bland smile, and in excellent English, "we never had the smallest commercial transaction in negotiation between us."

"Indeed! then I must acknowledge myself in error."

"Allow me to introduce myself—I hope, to your favourable notice."

"Certainly," said Mr. Elias Sydmonton, elevating his eyebrows.

"I am a merchant at Puy-di-Dome, and also at Bordeaux. Possibly I ought to add, in a small way of business."

"Are you in the wool trade?" inquired Elias Sydmonton, who as yet did not see his way, and was wandering in the dark.

"I am," answered M. Vellac.

"Have you any claim upon me?" asked the woolstapler, who began to be enlightened.

"I do not wish to assert or enforce any claim, Mr. Sydmonton," replied the Frenchman. "I am desirous, if possible, to effect your salvation."

"My salvation, sir!"

"Precisely. Your embarrassments are no secret either to your friends or the public. It is rumoured that you will have considerable difficulty in meeting your numerous continental engagements."

"That is perfectly true," said Elias Sydmonton, with a sigh.

"In point of fact," continued M. Vellac, "your credit on the Continent is very much worse than it is here. Neither Lafitte, Rothschild, or Perine would touch your paper at any price."

"The times are precarious."

"They are. Now, although you may not be aware of the fact, I have bills of yours in my pocket to the value of one hundred thousand pounds!"

"Eh!" cried Mr. Sydmonton, starting from his chair in the utmost surprise; "God bless me!"

"If you doubt my veracity, I can easily convince you," continued

the Frenchman, touching his coat, as if he were about to produce some documents.

"Not at all," interrupted Mr. Sydmonton. "I am quite content to take your word. You must excuse my agitation. Your intelligence, I must confess, startled me."

"It would have been surprising had it not done so," said M. Vellac, calmly. "I am one of your largest creditors."

"The largest, my dear sir—the largest."

"Let it be so."

"May I inquire how the bills came into your hands?"

"That is a matter of no importance. In the way of trade we have bills of every description."

"I thought you might have bought them at a depreciation."

"We will not go into that," said M. Vellac. "Suffice it for the present, that I am the absolute *bonâ fide* holder for value of these bills, representing, as I had the honour of telling you before, the enormous total of one hundred thousand pounds."

"Very well," murmured Mr. Sydmonton, resignedly.

"You will perceive that I am an important creditor."

"You are, indeed."

"These bills will arrive at maturity in a week."

"They will."

"Are you in a position to meet them, and take them up?" inquired M. Vellac.

"Frankly, no. I will not seek to conceal my position, or disguise my prospects, M. Vellac," exclaimed Elias Sydmonton, with that innate candour which had always distinguished him.

The Frenchman nodded his head, as if in appreciation of this sentiment.

"I cannot by any possibility take up these bills; it is utterly out of my power. I must therefore throw myself upon your clemency, and entreat your indulgence. If you withhold it, I shall be most reluctantly compelled to file my petition."

"Hem!" said M. Vellac, as if considering the position in a new light, "there is such a thing as reckless trading; and your Commissioners in Bankruptcy might be inclined to dwell upon the fact of the foreign market being flooded with paper at a time when the utmost caution should have been exercised."

"Of all that I must run the risk," said Sydmonton; "but you must permit me to observe, that three months ago it was impossible to foresee the present state of things."

"There we join issue. However, I have not journeyed all the way from Puy-di-Dome to fill you with vague fears, or overwhelm you with reproaches; far from it. Let me ask you a question. Can you meet your obligations in England?"

"I reply unhesitatingly in the affirmative," said Elias Sydmonton, looking up with a sort of joyful wonder, as if he fancied an unlooked-for deliverance was at hand.

"You would of course give much to be saved from bankruptcy, disgrace, and ruin?" continued M. Vellac, with a viperish glance, which passed unnoticed by the unsuspecting merchant.

"If you only knew how much——"

"I can guess, without much difficulty. To-morrow morning I will, with your permission, go over your books, and if my inspection is satisfactory, I will offer you a means out of your present danger."

"You will? Generous stranger!" cried Mr. Sydmonton; "how can I find words to express my thanks?"

"Wait," replied M. Vellac; "check your impulsiveness. You have not yet heard my terms, nor do I know that you will accede to them."

Mr. Sydmonton offered his friend a bed, which was refused. M. Vellac took his departure as soon as his business was concluded, promising to be at the merchant's office in Great St. Helen's at ten o'clock the next morning.

During the whole of that night Elias Sydmonton lay awake, pondering the extraordinary visit of the mysterious foreigner in his mind. It was very strange. What were the terms he was about to propose? Whatever they were, he was disposed to accept them, because his position was so desperate that, like a drowning man floating by a straw, he could not despise the most fragile support which offered itself.

The next day the woolstapler went early to town, and made inquiries at several foreign houses where he was known respecting M. Vellac, merchant, of Puy-di-Dome and Bordeaux; but, oddly enough, no one seemed to know him, or to have ever had any dealings with him.

At the appointed time M. Vellac arrived, and after addressing a few commonplace remarks to Matthew Tabernacle, was ushered into the inner office where Sydmonton was awaiting him.

"Good morning, sir. You are punctual, I perceive," exclaimed Sydmonton, listening to the bell of a neighbouring church which was chiming the early hour of ten.

"In matters of business it is absolutely necessary to be so," responded Vellac. "I once lost an appointment worth many thousand francs a-year through being five minutes behind time; that was a valuable lesson to me."

"So I should apprehend. Pray be seated, sir. My clerk will bring in the books at once, if you wish it, and will attend to answer any question you may wish to put to him."

The Frenchman signified that that was what he wished. Accordingly, Matthew Tabernacle, obeying a command of his master, laid a statement of Mr. Sydmonton's affairs before him. In an hour's time he was *au fait* with the situation, and said, "That will do, thank you. There is nothing more that I want to know."

"Are you perfectly satisfied?" inquired Elias.

"Quite," replied Vellac.

"You can go, Tabernacle. Yet, stay; is there any news this morning?"

"I am sorry to say, sir, that the great house of Copplestone, Beddow, and Martin, has 'gone.' We lose ten thousand pounds by them," answered the clerk.

"Dear me! this is terrible, terrible!" exclaimed Sydmonton.

M. Vellac smiled grimly. These successive crashes in the commercial empire seemed to please him.

When the clerk had quitted the apartment, M. Vellac crossed his legs, and assuming a business-like air, said, "Your difficulties are serious, my dear Mr. Sydmonton, but with a little support you will get over them."

"Support! oh, yes!" replied the merchant, catching eagerly at the word.

"You want bolstering up."

"Who will do it?"

"No one, unless he has an interest in the concern."

"An interest!" replied Elias Sydmonton; "of what nature?"

"Of course, a direct interest."

"Such as——"

"Such as a—shall we say, a partnership?" rejoined M. Vellac, with the most perfect unconcern that so thorough a man of the world as himself could assume.

Mr. Sydmonton breathed heavily. The designs of his foreign acquaintance were now unveiled; it was evident that he wished to insinuate himself as a partner into the house of Sydmonton, and, on consideration, his proposal did not appear so utterly unreasonable; he was prepared to save the house which was tottering.

"Allow me to look at the bills of which you spoke," said Sydmonton.

"With pleasure."

He took a portfolio from a small parcel he carried in his hand, and gave it to the merchant, who hastily turned over its contents, with hurried comments of this description—"Yes, quite right; I drew upon Valise, Jacques, and Co., at three months—very accurate. Mirès and Co., Parquet Durand—yes, yes. So, sir," he added, "if I understand you rightly, you wish me to admit you as a partner in my business, provided you throw these obligations into the concern. Is that so?"

"I will do more than that; I will put vitality into it by the aid of money. Listen to me."

Elias put himself in an attitude of attention, while Vellac went into a lengthy exposition of his affairs. He stipulated that Mr. Sydmonton's two sons, who already had small shares in the business, should be retained, and that he should manage the foreign trade, while Elias, as before, undertook the conduct of the English business. After some consideration, Elias agreed to accept these

terms. A deed of partnership was drawn up by a competent and experienced solicitor, and the name of the house was altered to Sydmonton, Sons, and Vellac, an arrangement which did not create much surprise in the commercial world, the members of which applauded Elias for his shrewdness in taking in a moneyed partner at a time of panic.

It subsequently came to Elias's knowledge that Vellac had bought up the mass of bills bearing his name for a very small sum of money, by the outlay, in fact, of only a few thousands. The result of the amalgamation did credit to his penetration; the business of the house almost doubled itself, and when the profits at the end of the half-year came to be divided, it was found that the partners were making an income of twenty thousand a-year. The business developed itself in a magnificent way; after the disastrous storm came a prosperous calm; but Vellac was not satisfied. The demon of gain took possession of him; the fiends of greed and cupidity entered into his soul, and he longed to acquire the whole of the trade.

Twelve months elapsed. Vellac was very little on this side of the channel. He travelled from one place to another on the Continent in the interests of the firm, and did much good. At Christmas he accepted an invitation to Marble Hill, and then the hand of the ruthless destroyer began to be busy.

Elias Sydmonton's eldest son Robert was now a fine fellow, a thorough man of business, and the pride and delight of his father. Robert Sydmonton and Vellac were inseparable companions; they rode together, shot, skated, walked, played billiards, smoked together. The young man was fascinated by what he thought the brilliant qualities of his friend, and admired him with all the ardour of impulsive youth.

The winter was a hard one. Frost and snow were the order of the day; a large lake on the Marble Hill estate was frozen over, and Robert was at home upon the ice. His brother Ernest was of a more timid and retiring disposition, and he preferred reading in the library to indulging in the rude field-sports in which his more robust relative found endless enjoyment.

One day, Vellac and Robert went out as usual to skate. Some labourers on the estate looked on wonderingly at their really clever and scientific evolutions. Suddenly the ice broke, and both were immersed in the chilly water. Robert sank, and the bystanders declared that Vellac did nothing to save him. One man, not having the fear of his superiors before his eyes, said openly that Vellac, when Robert Sydmonton rose to the surface, placed his hands on his shoulders, and by this act gave old Charon a soul to ferry over the Styx, for the unhappy youth was never seen alive again.

The loss of his eldest son was a great blow to Elias. The event also preyed upon Mrs. Sydmonton, who shared her husband's

grief. Vellac, of course, was profuse in his condolences; he deplored the accident loudly, and, in spite of the injurious rumours afloat respecting him, Mr. and Mrs. Sydmonton believed him to be their friend, and were thankful for his sympathy. Only a bereaved father can tell the grief which the loss of a much-beloved and promising son occasions; but those who have been chastened by the destroying angel can spare a tear of pity for Elias, who had lost the child of his age.

On the day which succeeded this melancholy event, the following telegram passed through my hands, though at that time I had but a poor idea of its startling significance:—

“Dearest Amélie—I have the extreme pleasure of informing you that one of the three branches appertaining to the old tree has been successfully lopped off. Ever yours, Auguste. I kiss your hands.” This was sent by Auguste Vellac to Madame Amélie Vellac, Rue Chateaubriand, Champs Elysées, Paris.

The name of Vellac being a singular one, it lingered in my memory, and when receiving the message from the bearer of it, I took the liberty of indulging in so comprehensive and impertinent a look, that his remarkable features were indelibly engraven on my memory.

Months flew along, and Sydmonton, *Son*, and Vellac continued to prosper. The business extended itself, and its ramifications were too numerous to mention; but while his material prosperity was on the increase, his domestic felicity continued to decline. Ernest, his surviving son, fell into a state of ill-health. The most experienced physicians were called in, but their prescriptions were of no avail. It was suggested that he studied too much, and that he ought to travel, as the best means of affording relaxation to his mind. He was sent to the South of France, under the care of his father's dear friend, M. Vellac; but, strange to say, the poor fellow only grew worse, and at last it was feared that he would fall a victim to that fell disease and invincible scourge of our island, consumption.

Mr. Sydmonton happened to know a captain in the navy, who had the command of one of Her Majesty's ships which was under orders for the Mediterranean. Captain Powell, knowing that Ernest was in a decline, offered to take him for a cruise, and the offer was cheerfully accepted, though it was much opposed by Vellac, who wished the boy to stop at home. When he returned after three months' absence, he was very much better. The peculiar climate in which he had been had acted favourably upon his constitution, and his mother and father began to hope. His health, however, did not last long—to come in contact with Vellac was, for him at least, to lie under the deadly influence of the upas-tree.

At length he died. Under this infliction his mother utterly broke down. She was unable to support the weight of this super-

lative catastrophe. As before, the Frenchman entered into their sorrow, as if he had himself lost a dearly-prized relative. The brothers were buried side by side. Again the telegraph was put in requisition; M. Vellac communicated with Mme. Amélie, and repeated the former telegram with a slight variation. This time he said, "A second branch has fallen from the old tree; but one now remains!"

Although Mrs. Sydmonton had everything around her that money could command, she was unable to rise superior to the shock which convulsed her system. Her husband—always fond and devoted, trebly so now that she was bowed down and afflicted—did all that lay in his power to alleviate her distress. He, too, was acquainted with sorrow, and in no small degree. Since his acquaintance with Vellac he had been singularly fortunate in business, but a blight seemed to have fallen upon his home life, than which nothing is more precious to a domesticated Englishman. His calamities were not yet over. His second son had not rested six months in his grave before Mrs. Sydmonton followed him to the tomb. He was now alone in the world; he had no friend with the exception of Vellac, whom he would have trusted with his soul, so great was his confidence in him.

The day after Mrs. Sydmonton's death, I forwarded a third telegram from Vellac to Madame Amélie. It was more strikingly significant than either of those which had preceded it:—

"The third blow has been struck:—the tree is now naked. Its branchless trunk alone stands between us and gigantic opulence. Trust in me. Soon all will be ours!"

I have often regretted that the knowledge which is now mine was at that time denied me, for I might have saved the life of a good and excellent man.

About this time, I was instrumental in telegraphing a most extraordinary message to Mr. Sydmonton; it purported to come from an English gentleman, named Owen Metcalfe, residing at Nice, and was as follows:—"Dear Friend—Do not think me childish, but I had a remarkable dream last night, in which you were the principal actor. I fancied that you were visiting a vault in some churchyard, and weeping bitterly over a coffin. While thus engaged, a man of slender build, tall, and well attired, came up to you, knocked you on the head with just sufficient violence to stun you, and then forced the contents of a bottle of laudanum, or some dark-looking fluid, down your throat. Having accomplished his purpose, he decamped, leaving you dead or dying. For Heaven's sake be careful, and if you meditate a visit to a churchyard, forego it, if only to humour my prejudice and superstition."

Owen Metcalfe was a friend of Sydmonton's, and of long standing. The warning reached him in due course, but he did not attach any importance to it. On arriving at his office, he handed

the lengthy telegram to Vellac, who read it carefully, and exclaimed, with a laugh—

"Your friend's mind is a little distempered. I should think he must have been reading the 'Night Side of Nature.'"

"I cannot help laughing," said Mr. Sydmonton, "but——"

"What?" asked Vellac.

"There is something very singular about his warning."

"What is it?—that your friend is out of Bedlam?"

"Oh dear, no."

"Will you enlighten me?"

"I mean to do so. You are my friend, and will not ridicule my confidence."

"I would rather perish," said M. Vellac, laying his hand on his heart with a theatrical gesture.

"I know it; accept my thanks. I doubt whether one man ever owed more to another than I to you."

"Oh! you flatter."

"Not in the least."

"What is there peculiar about this warning from Nice?"

"Simply this," said Sydmonton: "I proposed to-morrow going to Kensal Green, where my poor boys and their sainted mother are buried." Here he passed the back of his hand over his eyes, the least suspicion of a tear having appeared in both. "That vault contains all that I loved on earth."

"This does you credit, my dear friend," cried Vellac, wringing his hand warmly. "You have a heart, which is a scarce commodity in these days."

"Ah! I have had some severe trials."

"You have; but you will have your reward," said Vellac, in the canting tone of a hypocrite. "Shall you go?" he added, carelessly.

"Decidedly. I am not superstitious, and I attach no importance to Metcalfe's dream. Still, you must confess that it is strange."

"A coincidence—that is all."

"You will go with me, Vellac?" exclaimed Elias Sydmonton.

"Let me see—to-morrow; did you say to-morrow?"

"I did."

"What have I to do to-morrow? Ah! by the way, I must superintend the lading of that ship for the Brazils. Then Sherard, the banker, is coming up from Leytonstone respecting the Egyptian loan. No, my friend, I am afraid I must sacrifice amity at the shrine of commerce."

"Ever busy; how indefatigable you are, Vellac. I believe I owe my present prosperity to your restless industry."

"No, no; you are too good; you must not put yourself so far in the background. All I can say is, that my poor efforts in the right direction have fortunately been crowned with success."

"Are you sure that you will be unable to accompany me to-morrow?" queried the merchant.

"I regret to say, I shall be unable to do so, unless you insist——"

"By no means. If you were in my place, would you go?"

"To be sure I should. Never encourage a weak mind; let mental strength soar above physical weakness at all times."

"You are right, and counsel well. Your advice shall be taken. What have I to fear? Who would attack me in a large cemetery in the middle of the day? You know the vault?"

"I remember it indifferently well," replied M. Vellac.

"It is a gloomy place, but there are always people about and within call. Oh, yes—I'll go, I'll go."

"That's right—that's a spirit I like to see. I should recommend you to encourage and foster that spirit."

"I will; you recall me to myself, and make a man of me again. To tell the truth, Vellac, my spirit yearns after my poor wife, and when you and the world think me far differently employed, I—I steal down to the graveyard, and weep over her coffin. I know it well—it is stained with my tears. This is a weakness; but tell me, Vellac, whether it be an amiable weakness or the contrary?"

"The contrary—I should say the contrary," returned Vellac.

"And why?"

"Because—because it seems like rebelling against the decrees of the Supreme Power. We should be humble and submissive, you know; we should not repine; that is wrong—decidedly wrong."

"To weep over one's wife's grave is wrong!" said Sydmonton, musingly.

"Can there be a doubt about it?"

"I don't know, I'll think more on it; but—I'll go to-morrow."

M. Vellac remained at the office the next day until Elias Sydmonton left it; then he, too, quitted it on the pretext of attending to some pressing business.

Mr. Sydmonton went in a hansom cab to the cemetery, and walked sadly along the neatly gravelled walks to the place where the tomb he was in quest of was situated. A walk through a cemetery—eloquent city of the dead!—is at all times depressing to the spirits; but to him it was doubly so.

He had a key which gave him admittance to the vault. He entered without being observed, and in order to introduce more light into the funereal chamber, left the door partly open. A damp, mouldy smell assailed the nostrils, and a silence awfully oppressive reigned, undisturbed by the slightest sound.

Three coffins placed one above another brought him to a standstill. One contained the mortal remains of Robert Sydmonton, the second of Ernest, and the third and uppermost one, of their mother. Faintly the tolling of a chapel bell stole into the vault on the wings of the sluggish wind. Sinking on his knees, Elias Sydmonton thought of his wife—of his offspring—all snatched from him when he had most need of their loved presence; and was it wonder his tears fell thick and fast?

Suddenly a dark shadow obscured the door of the vault. Sydmonton was too much engrossed and wrapped up in his meditations to notice the decrease of light, nor did he hear a gentle foot-fall, as a man crept up to him with all the stealthiness of a snake. Elias was speaking in a subdued tone; he said—"Louise!—darling Louise! if you are permitted to hear my voice, receive my assurance that your memory is as dearly cherished by me now, as was your loved self when on earth."

Those were the last words spoken by the merchant of Great St. Helen's. The shadow behind him caused something to rush through the air with a heavy "thud" upon his head; then—just as Owen Metcalfe had seen in his mystic dream, many hundred miles away from the scene of action—the shadow forced the contents of a phial down Elias Sydmonton's throat, and having accomplished his nefarious purpose, vanished from the vault.

No eye save that of Heaven witnessed the commission of this horrid crime; but the Nemesis which is always on the track of the evil-doer attended his footsteps from the first. Skilful as was the assault on Mr. Sydmonton, it was marked by one error—nay, by two:—the assassin had, in his hurry, dropped the weapon with which he stunned his prey, and carelessly threw away the phial when it had answered his purpose. When the body was found, these things were discovered and placed in the hands of the police, whose directions from head-quarters were to find out by whom they had been purchased, and to whom they had belonged.

On the afternoon of this most foul and unnatural murder, M. Vellac, smiling in his peculiar fashion, came into the telegraph office, and sent the fourth of a series of messages. It was directed, as had been the former ones, to Mme. Amélie, at Paris, and was concise and somewhat epigrammatic:—"The branchless tree has fallen—all is ours. In one week let me see you in London."

On the following day, a detective whom I knew came into the office, and nodding to me, drew me on one side, saying, "Dreadful affair this, Mortimer!"

"To what do you allude?" I inquired.

"Haven't you heard? Why, I thought it was all over London by this time. I mean the Kensal Green murder—the murder in the vault—don't you know?"

"Up to the present time I have heard nothing."

"I can tell you, then, as much as anyone, for I have the conduct of the case."

"I shall be glad to listen to you, Drake," I said. "Do you want to put the wires in motion?"

"Presently," replied Drake; "I will have five minutes' chat with you first."

"Who is the murdered man?"

"Rather a celebrity about here; a merchant of St. Helen's—name of Sydmonton."

"Indeed! I know him well by name; went into partnership with a Frenchman, I think."

"Yes, Vellac."

"Ah! that's the name; he sent a telegram yesterday."

"Where to?" eagerly inquired the detective.

"To Paris."

"Can I see it?"

"If you wish it. I have for many years past made it a practice to enter all striking telegrams in a book; I have found it useful in many ways. I have the book in the next room, and you can glance over its pages if you like. But go on about the murder; you have excited my curiosity, and are in duty bound to gratify it."

"Sydmonton," began Drake, "went to Kensal Green to visit the vault in which his wife and two children repose; while there he was brutally murdered. There you have it all in brief."

"Have you no clue?"

"If I tell you anything, I speak in perfect confidence."

"Certainly," I replied.

We had not yet entered my private office, but were standing near the door giving admittance from the street, so that anyone having a wish to listen to our remarks could do so; but as there was no one about, we did not attach any importance to this circumstance.

"I ask you to keep anything I may say a secret, because if these things get into the newspapers, the man we want is on his guard in a moment."

"Oh, yes; I understand that fully."

"Well, I fancy that I can prove that the phial found in the vault was purchased by Vellac in the City Road; and if I am not much mistaken, the loaded stick with which the deed was done was also Vellac's property. Wait awhile, and I will astonish people. I am about to telegraph to the principal ports in the kingdom, so that the police may be on their guard, and having stopped my bird's outlets, I will proceed to snare him."

During these remarks, I had heard the door open, but so interested was I in Drake's recital, that I paid no attention to the new-comer. When he had finished speaking I looked up, and saw a tall man making his way out of the office.

"There!—look there!" I cried, addressing Drake, and pointing with outstretched hand to the retreating figure.

"Where?—what?" asked Drake.

"You see that man?"

"Yes; what of him?"

"If that isn't Vellac himself, I'll never offer an opinion again about any man's identity."

"Vellac! How long has he been here?"

"I really don't know; perhaps about two minutes."

"Time enough to overhear all my remarks. Confound it! I

would rather have forfeited five sovereigns than this should have happened."

Mollifying the detective as well as I could, I brought out the book, and allowed him to look at it. The messages I have quoted attracted his attention, and he exclaimed loudly, "I believe he has murdered the whole family!"

"What could his object be in bringing about such wholesale slaughter?"

"Money, of course."

"But he had it."

"Possibly; but the more some folks have, the more they want. It is in the nature of mankind never to be satisfied with what we have, but always to wish for something in excess."

"What a villain!" I ejaculated.

"You may well say that. Here is my telegram, and on this piece of paper are the towns to which I wish it to be sent; despatch it at once, will you? Very awkward, the man coming in at the time I was disclosing my plans to you. Who'd have thought it?"

"No one. It was one of those fortuitous occurrences which it is almost impossible to guard against."

Events began to multiply themselves: that afternoon Vellac turned everything that was susceptible of such treatment into money, and left London. Matthew Tabernacle was left in charge of the business, but he had no idea where his master had gone.

Three days passed. On the morning of the fourth, Drake came to me, and said, "I suppose you know Vellac has levanted?"

"So I have been told; that proves that he must have overheard us."

"No doubt. You know him well, I believe. Now, although I have a pretty accurate description of him, I am not sure that I should know him by sight. So I want you to come with me to three or four places where he is likely to be, so that if I effect a capture, there may be no mistake about it."

"I will telegraph to the chief office, and ask the manager if I can be spared," I replied.

Going to a machine, I asked the young lady who was working it if it was disengaged.

"It will be directly, sir," she replied. "I am just finishing a message from Paris, which has to go to Richmond."

"From Paris!" I said.

"Yes, sir."

"Who is the sender?"

"It is from Amélie to Auguste—that is all."

"Bravo!" I cried, unable to restrain my exultation.

"What's the matter?" inquired Drake, coming to my side.

"Wait a bit, and you shall see," I replied.

"Don't be more mysterious than you can help."

"Be good enough to hand me a copy of that telegram," I said to the operator.

She did so, and holding it up, I read—"Dear Auguste, I have received your second message, and will at once come to you at the hotel you mention in Richmond. I am sorry affairs have taken so bad a turn."

Drake rubbed his hands together in uncontrollable glee.

"That's your sort!" he exclaimed. "That's what I call luck, and no blooming error about it! Vellac's in Richmond."

"And we shall have him."

"Without the shadow of a doubt. Bravo, Rouse!"

Through this accident we obtained a clue to Vellac's whereabouts, and paid him an unexpected visit that evening. We found him smoking a cigar after dinner, and drinking wine of a most expensive description. Having told the proprietor of the hotel our object, we were allowed to walk into his apartment unannounced.

"Who are you?" cried M. Vellac, with a start.

"We belong to the A Division of the Metropolitan Police, Mr. Vellac, and have a warrant for your arrest."

"My—my arrest?" he stammered.

"Yes," replied Drake, exhibiting a pair of handcuffs.

With a rapid movement Vellac gained a sideboard, on which, in a case of rosewood lined with dark-coloured velvet, lay a revolver. Placing it to his head, he said, in a tone of concentrated fury, "This shall disappoint you!"

I made a bound over a couple of chairs to frustrate his suicidal intention; but although I contrived to touch his arm as the pistol exploded, I was unable to prevent the infliction upon himself of a terrible and mortal wound. He fell covered with blood. His existence after that moment was merely a matter of calculation.

The next day Amélie arrived. She was a dashing, handsome, superbly-dressed Frenchwoman. I arrogated to myself the task of speaking to her.

"Is Monsieur Vellac here?" she asked.

"He is, madame," I replied.

"Announce me, and show me his rooms."

"He is dying, madame."

"Dying!" she ejaculated, turning pale, in spite of the rouge on her cheeks.

"Yes, madame, he has attempted to blow his brains out, to avoid falling into the hands of the police, who were about to arrest him; but he is still sensible, should Madame wish to speak to him."

"No, it is not necessary. He has my best wishes," she returned, with a callous coldness that was disgusting.

Getting into the fly that had brought her from the railway-station, she went away as unconcerned as if nothing whatever had happened.

Vellac lingered four-and-twenty hours. Many, many times he muttered—"Amélie, Amélie! Oh, Heaven! why does she not come? It was all for her—all, all! She lured me on to ruin and perdition. If I could but see her! Amélie! Amélie! one word—one word before I die!"

In pity to a dying man, we spared him the knowledge of Amélie's heartlessness, and he died with her name on his lips.

"Amélie! Amélie!" was his incessant cry. Oh! it was pitiful to hear him.

When all was over, Drake led me from the room, and said, "We have to thank the Telegraph for helping us to rid society of a ruffian."

"Yes," I replied, abstractedly.

I was thinking of the Sydmontons—dead and gone; of Vellac—justly punished; and—shall I say it?—of Amélie, beautiful as an angel, but wicked as a very fiend.

VIII.—A RUN ON THE BANK.

SOME years ago, John Westland traded as a banker in the City of London, under the title and name of Westland Brothers. This was the original designation of the bank, and had been handed down pure and undefiled for at least a century.

His managing clerk rejoiced in the euphonious cognomen of Lyons. Nothing pleased Arthur Lyons better than an invitation to his employer's country-house. Shrewd observers said that the mere matter of a dinner and an agreeable evening were scarcely sufficient to tempt the manager as far as Norwood, which was not then, as now, an accessible suburb. These shrewd observers hinted that John Westland's pretty daughter possessed a magnetic power of attraction which was irresistible. Arthur Lyons, although holding a responsible position, was only thirty years of age, and sufficiently susceptible to be enchained by the charms of a pretty woman.

In addition to her beauty, Miss Agnes Westland had another qualification, which entitled her to the notice and admiration of a man who was obliged to earn his living by his daily toil. She was the daughter of a rich man, and would in all probability be the heiress of great wealth. It may be urged that Arthur Lyons was more than mortal, if he did not take this latter fact into

consideration. Very well. Then he *was* more than mortal; for with a perfect abnegation of self, and a total denial of personal interests, he would have made Agnes Westland his wife if she had not a penny. He loved her simply and purely for herself alone.

But there were obstacles—and very serious ones—to the successful prosecution of his suit. Mr. Westland, trading under the name of Westland Brothers, had plenty of money, and an excellent commercial education. All he wanted was rank. He was married himself, had a wife alive, and could not hope in his own proper person for a noble alliance. If anything, his wife was a little below him in social status. Where, then, was he to look, if not to his daughter? It was the pet and darling scheme of his life to aggrandize his family through the medium and by the help of his daughter; and he had often said as much in his confidential moments to his managing clerk.

To employ a high-flown metaphor, it was like plunging sharp-pointed Venetian daggers in Arthur Lyons' heart to talk to him in such a strain. It was a death-blow to his hopes; and yet love—dear, irresistible, inextinguishable love—is so audacious, that the clerk, in spite of all difficulties and dangers, continued to pursue what he thought a just course, and lay legitimate siege to Agnes Westland's heart.

She reciprocated his affection, and openly told him so with many a fond and loving look. Though she denied herself or him words, the language of the heart was expressively spoken by a fleeting glance or a half-drawn sigh.

Mr. John Westland was so engrossed in business and so puffed up with pride, that he did not see what was going on under his very nose. In his pomposity the lovers found their safety.

Mrs. Westland had an inkling of the real state of affairs; but though she was so far observant, she did not assume the character of an angry or injured mother. She was too easy-going, indifferent, and—shall I, in the exigencies of truth, say—too lazy to decidedly interest herself in anything but her personal comforts? Any personal discomfort was avoided by her as if it had been a deadly pest.

Arthur Lyons had a rival who unblushingly took the field against him. This rival was a man at the head of the bullion trade, named Coulson Masters. He was an old and experienced bullionist, and understood the exchanges of Europe as well as any trader in London. He had for many years banked with Westland Brothers. His was, as may be supposed, a very large banking account, and one which conferred *prestige* upon the house. John Westland was extremely civil to him whenever he met him, and felt proud and honoured by his presence at his country-house at Norwood.

Coulson Masters fell violently in love with Miss Westland, and

one evening, when the wine was on the table, told her father so. John Westland was delighted to hear it; he congratulated himself upon the fact of his having obtained such a suitor, for it was well known that Coulson Masters would be Lord Mayor in two years' time, and it was rumoured that a royal marriage would take place in the identical year of his mayoralty, which would inevitably result in the honour of knighthood or a baronetage to him, as the chief magistrate of the City on the auspicious occasion. To hail his daughter as Lady Coulson Masters, at once became the acmé of the banker's ambition, and he determined to further the project as much as lay in his power. But, like many other sagacious and far-seeing men who indulge chimeras in their speculative moments, he reckoned without his host. He indulged in that charming yet disappointing amusement of counting his chickens before they were in a sufficiently forward state of incubation to justify the exaggerated mathematical calculation. He built a shadowy and unsubstantial castle in the air, which his daughter was the first to throw a stone at.

Agnes happened to be in the conservatory watering some flowers before breakfast the next morning, when her father sought her before going to the City.

"Look at this cactus, papa," exclaimed the maiden; "is it not beautiful?"

"Totally charming, my little Aurora," replied papa Westland, "but not nearly so beautiful as my pearl beyond all price."

"Oh, papa, what nonsense you talk! I am sure nothing animate, much less my poor self, can compare with the beauty of this rich and glorious flower."

"Never mind, my dear. Come hither, I have something to say to you," exclaimed her father.

She approached him smilingly, holding a sprig of fragrant mignonette in her hand.

"Well, what is this weighty communication?" she asked.

"I have found you what most young ladies do not despise."

"What is that?" she queried again.

"A sweetheart, my dear, and one in every way suited to you," said Mr. John Westland. "A highly respectable man, my dear; a great merchant, who will some day be Lord Mayor, and receive the honour of knighthood, or perhaps a baronetage will be conferred upon him. Think of that; you will be Lady——"

He hesitated, debating in his mind whether it would be prudent at this early stage of the proceedings to divulge the name of his intended son-in-law.

"Don't break off abruptly, papa," exclaimed Agnes; "let me hear my future title."

"It may be as well to tell you," he replied; "you must know it some day, so I will make no further reservation. The husband I propose for you is Mr. Coulson Masters, the celebrated bullionist."

"Coulson Masters!" repeated Agnes, with what sounded very much like a derisive laugh; "why, he is fifty, if he is a day!"

"Well, my dear, what of that?" said the banker, sternly—"what of that?"

"Only this: I prefer some one a little about my own age; and, papa——"

"What else?"

"Suppose—I only say suppose——"

"Yes, yes," he cried, impatiently.

"Suppose I have a sweetheart already?"

"I sincerely hope and trust that such is not the case; in fact, it cannot be, or you must be a very bad, deceitful girl," answered Mr. Westland, frowning ominously. "I can scarcely believe it possible that you can have been so disobedient as to form an attachment for any man without informing me of the fact."

"I throw myself on your clemency, papa," said Agnes, tremulously. "I have, indeed, given my heart away, but to one in whom you have always placed the greatest confidence. He is always with you, and if you did not wish him to make an impression upon me, you should not have thrown us so much and so constantly together."

"Of whom do you speak?" asked John Westland.

His brow was more lowering than it had been before. He had a great disinclination to play the part of a stern parent, but now or never was the time for him to do so.

"I speak of Arthur Lyons, your confidential clerk, the man who——"

"Has abused my confidence most shamefully," vociferated the banker, becoming purple with rage he could not suppress; "the viper whom I have warmed into strength and power to sting me. Low-bred, underhand scoundrel!—to try and rob me of my daughter!—was there ever such enormity known? But he shall leave the bank—he shall go! I will make him pay dearly for this. He marry my daughter!—not if I can prevent it, and I will do my best. By Heaven I will!"

Agnes was alarmed. She had never seen her father so much agitated before. He positively trembled with nervous excitement. A great sorrow had come upon her all at once; her dream of joy was turned into a miserable awakening.

"If you object to Mr. Lyons, papa," she said, with some dignity, "I will promise you never to see him again. I have no wish to reward your kindness with ingratitude; but if I do violence to my feelings in this way, you must have compassion upon me, for I declare most solemnly, that I will marry no one else. I will not so much as encourage your friend Mr. Masters by a word or a look. Since my intentions are frustrated by you, I shall resolve to live and die an old maid."

"Listen to reason, my child," said her father, gratified by her partial submission.

"It is useless to urge me further," she replied, with the tears rising up under her eyelashes. "I have arrived at an unalterable determination. Tell your friend Mr. Masters—or send him to me, so that he may hear it from my own lips—that I will never—never, under any circumstances whatever, become his wife."

"Is this your resolution?"

"It is!" she answered passionately.

Mr. Westland went to town that morning in anything but an enviable state of mind. His unfortunate clerk was the first to fall under the stinging lash of his sharp resentment. On reaching his private room, he sent for Arthur Lyons, who entered the room with a smiling countenance, recking little of the storm which had been brewing all the morning, and which was soon to burst over his devoted head.

"Good morning, sir," he said, blandly.

"Take a seat. I wish to have a little serious conversation with you."

"Certainly, sir," replied the clerk, seating himself at a respectful distance from his employer.

"I have heard from my daughter, Lyons, that you have had the unaccountable impudence to make love to her, and this without my knowledge or permission. Nay, nay, don't attempt to deny it; Agnes has confessed all. I have placed my veto upon the match, and Miss Westland has given me a sacred promise never to see you again. In order that she may not be tempted to break this promise, I shall at once discharge you, and make you a present of a year's salary, which will take you comfortably to Australia, where I trust your career may be prosperous."

Arthur Lyons listened to this harangue speechless with consternation. Never in the whole course of his life had he received such a shock and such a blow. For the time being it prostrated, it annihilated him.

Crushed into the very dust, he hid his face in his hands. His manhood gave way, and the scalding, bitter tears of soul-deadening grief forced themselves in floods through his fingers.

"Come, come, man!" exclaimed John Westland, a little contemptuously; "do not give way like a woman. It is useless for you to dream of staying in England. Go to an agent's at once, and make preparations for your departure in four-and-twenty hours. I have said all I have to say. I can spare you from the bank, and will myself superintend your department until I appoint your successor, which will be to-day or to-morrow."

The big lump rising in Arthur Lyons' throat utterly precluded the possibility of his making any reply. He tried to speak once or twice, but the effort very nearly choked him. Turning his back to the banker, he wiped his eyes as well as he could, to remove the

traces of his agitation, and went back to his own office. Ten minutes afterwards he put on his hat, and left the banking-house an altered man.

He endeavoured that day to obtain an interview with Miss Westland; but she, with Spartan heroism, in obedience to her promise made to her father, steadfastly, and with rather a curt message, refused to see him.

This refusal, more eloquent than words, told Arthur Lyon that the banker had spoken the truth. By a magnificent effort he rose superior to himself, succeeded in smothering the flame of love which burned so fiercely in his breast, and deluded himself with the idea that it was completely extinguished, when in truth the embers were still smouldering, ready at any time to burst into a blaze, if fanned by an amorous wind.

Within the four-and-twenty hours he left England for Melbourne.

Agnes had not dreamt of such a step.

On the evening of his departure, Mr. Coulson Masters was the welcome and the favoured guest at Mr. Westland's house. Agnes was distant and reserved, only replying politely in monosyllables when spoken to by Mr. Masters. Amongst other topics, business in the City was touched upon.

"I see," exclaimed Coulson Masters, "that you have got rid of your managing clerk."

"Why, yes; he sailed for Australia this morning," replied John Westland, dryly, casting a side glance at his daughter.

The effect of this answer upon Agnes was decided and unmistakable. She stared wildly at her father for a moment; then uttering a faint shriek, she fell back in her chair insensible.

Instantly all was in a state of commotion. Mr. Westland ran to his daughter's assistance. She was some time before she recovered, and then passed from one hysterical fit into another.

They carried her, sobbing and crying, into her bedroom, whither Mrs. Westland retired, after making an apology for her absence to Mr. Masters, who was left alone with Mr. Westland.

"I'll tell you what is, Westland," said Mr. Coulson Masters, with a decisive energy which was part and parcel of his character, "your girl don't care a brass farthing for me—don't deny it. I'm not blind, and can see as far through a brick wall as most people."

"I think you are rather hasty in coming to a conclusion," said Westland, timidly, not to say meekly.

"Not I. It's as plain as a pikestaff. I more than expect she was spooney on this clerk fellow of yours."

"No, no; I assure you."

"Don't run the risk of perjury; it's morally and legally wrong. Draw it a little milder, and listen to me. Your girl is dead-on to Arthur Lyons, and I can see isn't in the mood to marry me."

"But Arthur Lyons is on his way to Melbourne," urged John Westland.

"Granted; but his image lives in her memory. Now, look here, John Westland, I want your daughter. It isn't because I can't get anyone else, for you know as well as others, that I have only to go to heaps of places, and pick and choose the flower of the flock."

"Yes, that's true enough; and I am sensible of the high honour you propose doing me and my family."

"So you ought to be," replied Coulson Masters, whose good breeding was to be found chiefly in his patronymic.

The banker's blood began to boil at the calm, contemptuous manner of his visitor, but prudence constrained him to be silent, and he held his tongue.

"Tell you what, Westland," continued Coulson Masters, once more employing his favourite phrase; "I've set my mind on making your daughter my wife."

"I am proud to hear it."

"So you said before. Well, you must so work it that she will have me. If not——"

"What then?"

"Why, just this. It will be a case of stump and smash-up with you; for so help me—everything—I'll ruin you, if the event does not come off."

He ceased speaking, and looked inquiringly at the banker, who, plucking up a spirit, said—

"It is all very well to talk in that grandiose strain, but I very much doubt your ability to ruin me. I know you are a smart fellow, and have that reputation in the City——"

"I should think I have, too!" exclaimed Coulson Masters, unbuttoning the last button of his waistcoat, either in conscious pride or because he had enjoyed a good dinner. "There are but few things, John Westland, that I can't tumble to; and if I'm not slap-bang up to the mark, why, I'll never buy or sell an ounce of gold again!"

Westland was disgusted with the man's vulgarity, but he still contrived to restrain his impatience.

"You understand me, I hope?" added the bullion merchant.

"Perfectly," answered the banker.

"How do we stand?"

"You want my daughter, and if she will not have you, you declare that you will ruin me. Ha! ha! a good joke. Ruin me! Ha! ha! an excellent witticism!"

"Is it, though?" replied Coulson Masters. "Don't indulge that idea; if you do you'll find out your blooming error before you are six months older. What I have said I will do, I am able to do, and will carry out in spite of every obstacle. You go to your daughter—devilish pretty girl she is, and no mistake!—and tell her what I say."

I must have an answer in fourteen days; and if it isn't in the affirmative, why, you had better look out for squalls."

"Really, Mr. Masters," said John Westland, flushing all over his face, till his ears burned like fire, "I don't understand this treatment. I am unaccustomed to coercion, and I have a good mind to tell you——"

"Pish!" cried the bullionist; "that will do. We understand one another. Ring the bell, and let's have some coffee."

Smothering his rage, Mr. Westland rang the bell; but a few moments of reflection showed him that he was putting up with too much from his guest. How could he ruin him? Pooh! it was an idle threat, so he determined to give the rein to his resentment, and retaliate. When the servant entered, he exclaimed, quietly—

"Order Mr. Masters' carriage."

Coulson Masters jumped up in a rage, and looking from one to the other, said—

"Do nothing of the sort, my good fellow."

The man looked to his master, to see if he would cancel his instructions.

"Obey your orders!" exclaimed John Westland.

The servant left the room with an obsequious bow.

"Soh!" said Coulson Masters, drawing his breath quickly; "soh! my fine fellow, you have thrown down the gage of battle? I accept it; I pick up your gauntlet. Do you hear me? But by G—— you shall repent it!"

"Perhaps you will have the goodness to leave my house. I am not in the habit of being insulted in my own house," said John Westland,

"Your daughter——" began Masters.

"My daughter, sir, will have nothing to say to you. I would have endeavoured to persuade her to listen to your proposal; but since the low, coarse, and vulgar treatment I have received at your hands to-night, I shall not attempt to influence her in the least. You may do your worst; but mind one thing—I defy you."

Smiling grimly, Coulson Masters left the room, and soon afterwards entering his carriage, drove away vowing vengeance in his heart.

The next day Agnes was better, but very depressed. She went about her household duties with a weariness which did not escape the eye of her father, who stopped at home till the middle of the day, on purpose to speak to, console, and comfort her.

"My dear child," he said, "do not look so miserable. It kills me to see you so languid and indifferent to everything. You are totally changed."

"Is it my fault? am I to be blamed for possessing sensibility?" she replied.

"Not at all. I can, however, re-assure you to some extent. You shall not marry Coulson Masters."

"That is no re-assurance. No power on earth would have compelled me to do so."

"Agnes, Agnes! I am sorry to hear you speak in this strain. Your father's wishes should have some weight with you. Come, cheer up. You are young, and have the world before you. You will soon recover your former spirits and be happy."

"My life is blighted," she replied, sorrowfully. "The man I loved has left me; I shall never see him again. I blame myself as the cause of his exile."

"You are unjust to yourself, 'twas I——"

"No," exclaimed Agnes, firmly; "you were the primary cause, but I administered the *coup de grace* to his hopes. He sought me before he sailed. In obedience to the promise I gave you, I refused to see him, never dreaming that he would so soon quit the country. Oh! I am miserable—most miserable."

In vain John Westland endeavoured to comfort his conscience-stricken daughter. She was like Rachel grieving for her children, and refused to be comforted.

Some days elapsed, and Coulson Masters made no sign. In turning his threats over in his mind, Westland laughed them to scorn, and thought himself too rich, well-known, and old-established, to be in any way injured by the bullionist. But he was mistaken.

Masters was most inveterate in his hatreds; he never left a man he disliked until he had brought him to starvation and the gutter. In the present instance, he had a double incentive to revenge. He hoped to humble the pride of the father, and by this means get the daughter's consent to marry him. When Westland was without a penny, and the wolf was at the door, then he would have ten times greater chance of success than at present, when the banker was in a state of uninterrupted and unexampled prosperity.

In a short time Masters began to give an unmistakeable proof of his hostility. He took a step which astonished his antagonist; he aimed a blow at the banker through his business; *he withdrew his account.*

This may seem a trifling affair, but it was fraught with great consequences. Masters and Co. had banked with Westland Brothers ever since the commencement of the banking business, and their account had always been a very large one.

The agents of Coulson Masters industriously spread the fact of the withdrawal through the City, and on the afternoon of the same day numbers of merchants and others crowded round Masters, and asked him his reason for discontinuing his employment of the banker. Notably, Ebenezer Aaron and Co., represented by Solomon Aaron, the shrewdest man on the Stock Exchange, came to him, and said, "Is it true that you have withdrawn your large amount of monish from Westland Brothers?"

"Perfectly true—every halfpenny," replied Masters, with a significant glance.

"May I ask your reasons for such a proceeding?"

"Well, I won't say anything. I don't wish to injure anybody, that's the truth; I wouldn't do it."

"Very strange! Have any bills of his been returned?" asked the Jew, much perplexed.

"Don't ask me; I would rather not give my reasons; they will be apparent enough soon."

"Good day; I am much obliged to you," said Solomon Aaron, walking away.

The succeeding day witnessed the withdrawal of Ebenezer Aaron and Co.'s deposit. The reign of terror then began. A perfect panic took possession of every depositor in the bank of Westland Brothers; they rushed pell-mell to Lombard Street, to get their money away before the quickly-expected suspension of the bank.

John Westland trembled with apprehension; he knew not what to do. There was a run upon the bank. In the whole course of his experience he never was in such a dilemma. At last, driven into a corner and unable to gain assistance from anyone, he was compelled to suspend payment, and the business of Westland Brothers was not worth a twopenny-piece.

This was blow the first; and Coulson Masters chuckled inwardly at the success of his vindictive scheme. Westland's estate was thrown into bankruptcy, and, contrary to general expectation, paid twenty shillings in the pound, leaving, after all claims were satisfied, a handsome balance in the banker's favour. This balance he invested in the purchase of a share in a large wholesale furrier's business; he became a beaver-cutter and fur-merchant, buying all sorts of skins, such as beaver, deer, musquash, etc., and was known as Westland, Purkiss, and Co.

Purkiss was a harmless sort of man—excellent in his business, stupid and objectionable out of it. He wanted capital to extend his trade, and for that reason he took Westland in. For six months the concern flourished, made money, and Westland began to hold up his head again. Although it was an unsavoury business, the ex-banker began to take a great interest in it, and worked hard at it.

Coulson Masters had his eye upon him all this time. Westland fancied that his animosity was silenced—not a bit of it. He was only biding his time, so that the second blow might be more crucially severe when it did come. The bullionist, having the absolute command of unlimited capital, began to make his preparations for his second *coup*. He was an anaconda skilfully throwing his coils round his victim preparatory to administering the death-crush. He took a great interest all at once in the beaver-cutting trade, and evidenced a desire for the possession of musquash skins. The head of an old-established firm dying, he bought the business at a tremendous price, and carried it on under the

old name, but in a much more extended manner. The anaconda, darting out its forked and deadly tongue, and rearing its hideous and venomous head in the air, prepared to tighten its suffocating, strangling coils.

Colliton and Foote—or more properly speaking, Coulson Masters—sent word to their foreign agents to buy up every description of skin, so as to make the market as tight as possible. All the warehouses in America were brimful of furs, so were those in London.

Purkiss and Westland were at their wits' end; they could not get sufficient of the raw material for their hands to manufacture. Their stock was exhausted; they could not supply their customers. The anaconda was making itself felt.

When the pressure was at its height, and stagnation in the trade was threatened, Coulson Masters sent a hundred thousand pounds' worth of stock to a sale, ordering it to be sold in other names but his own. He attended the sale for the supposed purpose of buying. So did Purkiss and Westland.

"There he is!" said Westland. "Perhaps he thinks he is going to have the whole sale to himself."

"Ha! ha! perhaps he does," answered Purkiss, with a grin.

"But we'll show him he's mistaken, eh?"

"To be sure we will; wait a bit."

"How far can we afford to go?" asked Westland.

"We'll buy the lot, sir; he shan't have a skin."

"That's right," said Westland, highly delighted, and rubbing his hands. "Stick to that; he shouldn't have a hair of a skin, if I had my way."

"Never fear," returned Purkiss, holding a catalogue in one hand and a pencil in the other, and preparing to bid as the auctioneer entered his pulpit.

Coulson Masters had three paid agents in the room, whose faces were unknown to anyone, and this was the use he made of them: he wanted them to bid, not wishing it to be known that every bid came from himself. Two stood before him with their backs to him; he had one foot close to the right heel of each of them, and when he wanted them to bid he slightly kicked them. The third man was behind him. Under his arm Masters carried an umbrella, and when he wanted the third man to bid, he gave him an accidental job with his umbrella. This complication of ingenious contrivances was what he called "tactics."

The goods were put up at a high price, and Masters and his accomplices ran them up to three times their value; but such were the exigencies of Purkiss and Westland's trade, and so ardent their desire to be revenged on Masters, that they eagerly bought at this exaggerated figure. At the end of the sale they had spent every halpenny of their ready money, but they had bought the whole stock. Every bale of goods had been knocked

down to Purkiss and Co. at an extravagant price. Masters had bought nothing.

"We've beaten him!" said Westland, joyfully, to his partner.

"Yes, but the price was stiffish," replied Purkiss, with a wry face.

"Never mind that; we've got the market in our own hands."

"Yes, there's something in that."

Deluded men! They little dreamt that they had been buying their antagonist's goods at treble their actual value. They hadn't an inkling that Coulson Masters' warehouses were glutted with stock; but they knew it the next day, for Masters flooded the market, and they were nowhere. They found themselves burdened with an immense amount of stock, which they could only sell at an alarming sacrifice. In exactly thirty-one days, which was the extent of the succeeding calendar month, Purkiss and Westland figured conspicuously in the *Gazette*. This, for Westland, was bankruptcy number two, and all brought about by the unrelenting vindictiveness of Coulson Masters.

Masters met his old friend in the street a short time afterwards, and said, with mock commiseration, "Sorry to see your name in the *Gazette*. Going to pay in full?"

"You know as well as anyone," answered John Westland, indignantly, "that we cannot pay more than half-a-crown."

"Ah! you should not have bought so extensively on a late occasion, which is still fresh in my memory. Thought you'd got the pull of me then, eh?"

"You have been too much for me—I own it," said the ex-banker, with a sigh.

"Confession is good for the soul. By the way, how is your charming daughter?"

"In rather a delicate state of health. My misfortunes have not conduced either to her serenity or my wife's."

"Is the fair Agnes as obdurate as ever?"

"You had better visit us, and see," replied John Westland.

"Do I understand that you give me permission to renew my addresses?"

"Yes, that is a fair construction to put upon what I said."

"Where is your place now? I forget the name of your house in the country. Are you still there?" queried Coulson Masters.

"I regret to say, my calamities have necessitated a sale of all my effects. We are now living in poorly-furnished lodgings in the Old Kent Road."

"Indeed! Well, I will turn the matter over in my mind. You must remember, Westland, that your daughter is not now the desirable match she once was. A young lady in ill-health, with an unfortunate and poverty-stricken parent——"

"Sir! this language——" began Westland, hoarse with rage.

"There, there—don't lose your temper. It is only the truth, though I know the truth is generally unpalatable."

They parted, and the merchant went home to his dismal lodgings and his equally dismal family.

Now, the Old Kent Road is not a particularly lively thoroughfare in which to be domiciled; the chief thing that can be said in its favour is, that it leads to Greenwich, and from the Elephant and Castle; whitebait can be seen floating in a dim vision of waiters, champagne, and a bill as long as the Nelson monument.

At the time that Mr. Westland brought his storm-tossed domestic bark to an anchor in the Old Kent Road, not far from that ancient ecclesiastical edifice, the Marlborough Chapel, whose odour of sanctity is untainted by aught sectarian, the Metropolitan Board of Works, in pursuance of its main-drainage scheme, was kindly constructing a sewer; piles of bricks, restless steam-engines, uncultivated navigators—(why does not the legislature give the “uns,” that is to say, the unenlightened, unruly, unwashed, unkempt, unthankful—the vocabulary is long, but our space short—any number of votes?)—a blocked-up road, barricades of timber, mounds of clay, added considerably to the Babylonion desolation of the scene.

Dinner was not the sumptuous banquet now that it had once been with John Westland. The simple steak or the humble chop took the place of the venison and the turkeys of former days, a few fresh herrings represented the salmon and the turbot, and half a Dutch cheese served for the Parmesan and Stilton.

John Westland walked home from the City over London Bridge and through the teeming Borough, and sat down to his homely meal in melancholy silence.

“Have you seen any old friends to-day, papa?” inquired Agnes, who was wan and wasted.

“No; but I have seen an old enemy,” he replied, bitterly.

“Indeed? Who may he be?”

“Coulson Masters,” was the laconic answer.

The mention of this name recalled Agnes’s sad past, and she thought of Arthur Lyons, of whom she had heard nothing since his departure from England for Australia.

“What does he say for himself?” asked Mrs. Westland, curiously.

“He wants permission to pay his addresses to Agnes again. I believe, if she consented to marry him, he would settle something handsome upon her, and start me in business again.”

“Do you think so?”

“I am convinced that his hostility was purely and solely dictated by my curt dismissal of him that night after dinner, when Aggy fainted on hearing that Arthur Lyons had left the country. Faugh! how I detest the name of that scorpion! I look upon Lyons as the fountain and origin of all our evils.”

“If you wish me to make the sacrifice, and if Mr. Masters again honours me with his proposals,” said Agnes, “I will accept him; but I warn you, my dear father, that it will kill me.”

"Kill you!"

"Yes; but that does not matter very much," she added, with a reckless laugh. "I feel that I am dying now—dying daily—dying by inches, and each hour that passes but drives another nail into my coffin."

"Agnes! Agnes!" said her mother, reprovingly, "you must not talk in this wild, dreadful way."

"All I know is," exclaimed Mr. Westland, "that your acceptance of Coulson Masters would enable me to begin again, and end my days in peace, respectability, and quietness; but if, as you say, it would kill you, God forbid that I should say one word that would urge you on to such a consummation."

"What you have already said, dear father," answered Agnes. "has determined me."

"To do what?"

"To accept Mr. Masters."

"My darling child!" cried John Westland, rising from his chair, and flinging his arms round her neck in a transport of joy.

At the same time his eyes fell upon her pale face, which wore an expression of such unutterable anguish, that his heart smote him; yes, smote him with a heavy blow like that of a smith's hammer wielded by brawny arms, and ringing upon the cast-iron anvil.

"It is my duty to save you!" she added.

And so she sacrificed herself at the shrine of duty.

They decked her with garlands, as if she had been a lamb going to the slaughter on some festive occasion. Coulson Masters had not taken the trouble to make love in the orthodox manner; Westland's assurance that the girl would be his wife was quite sufficient for him. The day appointed for the marriage was ushered in by a cold, wet morning; the rain descended in torrents; but I was at my post, and at half-past eleven despatched the following message, which I had received from Southampton, to the Old Kent Road:—

"Dearest, ever-dearest Agnes!—I landed in England but yesterday, and was horrified to see your approaching marriage announced in a local print. I have always cherished you most tenderly in my memory, and now that I have returned with more wealth than I in my most sanguine moments hoped to possess, I venture to offer you my hand and heart, hoping that in your altered circumstances—of which I have been fully informed—your father will look favourably upon my offer. I have sufficient confidence in your lasting love and affection to feel convinced that you will not reject me. Break off this marriage, and expect me in town in a few hours. Yours ever—Arthur Lyons."

When this message—which I am constrained to admit was considerably delayed in its transit—reached the Old Kent Road, the wedding *cortège* had left for the church at which the celebration

was to take place. But the servant, who wished nothing better than to be present at the ceremony, took upon herself to hurry to the church with the message in her hand.

She arrived in time. In vain the beadle warned her back; fruitless were the efforts of the pew-openers to retard her progress. She made her way to Agnes, and placed the telegram in her hands, as she was advancing to the altar.

The signature arrested her attention, and she hastily glanced over the paper. Terrible was her emotion; she tottered, and sank into a seat. Her father caught the fluttering sheet, as, relinquished by her trembling hand, it fell to the ground.

"Oh, father!" she murmured, "have some pity—some compassion!"

Arthur Lyons rich, was a very different person from Arthur Lyons poor!

John Westland was shaken in his determination. Turning to Coulson Masters, he said—

"Sir, permit me to inform you that this marriage is broken off."

The bullion dealer gnashed his teeth with rage.

"What do you mean, sir?" he cried.

"Precisely what I have had the honour of saying."

"It is a breach of contract."

"Not at all. It is simply a breach of promise. You had better bring an action against me—that is your only remedy. The public like amusement, pray gratify them, and you may get damages!"

"This conduct is atrocious."

"No, it is not."

"I say it is."

"Shall I tell you what it is?" asked John Westland, with a peculiar intonation.

"If you like."

The banker approached him closer, and hissed in his ear—

"It is my revenge, Coulson Masters. You have had your turn; it is now mine, and this is *my revenge!*"

* * * * *

There was rejoicing that night in the Old Kent Road. What mattered it if the lodgings were poor and the furniture shabby? Arthur Lyons had come back to his first and his true love! Agnes was respited. She would yet live to bless the old age of her father and mother.

The life-spark was not to be crushed out of her by a hated and unnatural marriage; for it is against nature to unite people who are totally unsuited to one another,

After the marriage, Arthur Lyons and John Westland re-established the old banking business. They were partners now; but they still traded under the dear old name of Westland Brothers, and if honesty and love could make them akin, they were so.

Coulson Masters smiled grimly, but his sting was drawn; and

when the story of his passion and wicked persecution became known, the laugh went against him, and he could no more injure the freshly-erected firm of Westland Brothers, than he could fly, or scale the steep sides of lofty Mount Olympus.

IX.—A MYSTIC MESSAGE.

ON arriving at the office one morning in the month of August, I found the wires rather slack and the messages rather more dry and uninteresting than usual. They were chiefly commercial, and related to the price of goods, such as tallow, sugar, wheat, barley, malt and oats, with an occasional advice respecting small porkers and large hogs, and an occasional reference to choice lambs, plain wethers, and ewes with wool. If the wires were agitated in the neighbourhood of Newcastle, the chances were we should have news of Buddle's West Hartley, Braddyl's Hetton, Wall's End, South Kelloe, and other descriptions of coal.

It was rather a relief when the following telegram was handed to me by one of the young ladies, who had just copied it from the dial.

Taking the fluttering sheet in my hand, I was curious enough to read it before despatching it to its destination.

This was the message:—"From Charles Metcalfe, Solicitor, City, to Ernest Raby, Bolton Row.—Dear Charles,—Look at the 'agony column' in the '*Times*' this morning. I can't help thinking that the paragraph addressed to Raby must be meant for you. If so, follow it up, for you may be able to throw some light upon the mysterious fate of * * * * *. Yours ever—C. M."

"There is something odd about that," I exclaimed to myself; and turning to my book, I carefully transcribed it, wishing that I could hit upon a solution of the mystery.

Having accomplished this not very arduous task, I gave the "gram" as we call it in the slang of the trade, to a messenger, and despatched it to its destination.

As I returned to my room, a boy arrived with the "*Times*," which I always took the liberty of glancing over before sending up to the secretary's room, to which apartment it more properly appertained.

I could only imagine that the "agony column" referred to in the message was the second column in the "*Times*" advertisement

sheet,—that famous column, in which so many mysterious and enigmatical advertisements appear.

Full of expectation, I turned to it, and the very first thing my eye lighted on was an appeal to “Raby,” couched in these words:—

“If Raby will fly on the wings of the wind to the Children of the Moon, he will, in the hidden depths over which Diana alone has power, discover the grand secret of his existence.”

That was all; nothing more, not even an initial, appeared to help the neophyte in the mysteries of advertising to discover the meaning of this strange and fantastic appeal.

A Bedlamite would have raved about “wings of the wind,” “children of the moon,” “hidden depths,” “secrets of existence,” and so on, that is to say, if the aforesaid inhabitant of Bethlehem Hospital was gifted with a romantic imagination.

While I was wondering what all this could mean, the manager of the Company came in, looking as fresh as a rose, for he had just come up from Brighton.

“Good morning, Mortimer,” he exclaimed.

“Same to you, sir,” I replied.

“You are not looking up to the mark,” he continued; “I am afraid you work too hard—stick too closely to business, eh?”

“I try to do my duty, sir.”

“I know you do. How would you like to go into the country? This is holiday-time, and I think I may safely say that the Company can spare you for a fortnight.”

This notification was so completely and totally unexpected by me, that it took me altogether by surprise. I had not reckoned upon such generosity, but the Company was paying a splendid dividend. The manager had had his salary increased, and was consequently well-disposed to his fellow-men in general, and myself in particular.

When thinking about a holiday, I had not anticipated the grant of more relaxation than the permission to absent myself from Friday to Tuesday. I had even gone so far as to apportion that time in the following manner:—A visit to a rich old aunt, who lived in the congenial locality of Limehouse, and kept a marine store-shop, and was not altogether above the old iron and rag-and-bone trade; and then a trip by steamer to Calais or Boulogne, and a brief stay in one of those places, so dear to the Englishman emancipated from the thralldom of the desk or the counting-house.

“Well, Mortimer, what do you say?” exclaimed our manager. “Don’t go to sleep over it.”

This speech roused me from unseasonable indulgence in a very pleasant reverie.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” I replied, “but you very nearly took my breath away. I shall be only too glad to accept the fortnight’s holiday you offer me.”

"Go at once, then."

"At once, sir?"

"Yes. Put on your hat—start this minute. I will see that the work in your department is properly attended to."

Seeing that he really meant it, and not liking to neglect a chance like that which was offered me, I took him at his word, put on my hat, thanked him once more for his liberality, and was going away, when he stopped me, saying, "Wait half a minute, Mortimer; I had forgotten the most important thing."

"What's that, sir?" I ventured to inquire.

"Why, the sinews of war. Stay here, and I will send a cheque down to you. The 'Land-and-Water-Flash-of-Lightning Company' can afford to be generous to an old and conscientious servant, so if you find a small bonus, such as a ten-pound note, tacked on to your salary, you need not send it back."

Smiling benignantly, the manager walked up the lead-bound stairs, and disappeared in the managerial department, leaving me pleasantly occupied in speculating upon a happy holiday, which continued hard work made me stand much in need of.

In a few minutes a clerk descended the stairs, and handed me the promised cheque, which was for a munificent amount. I first went to the bank and got it cashed; then I strolled leisurely up to the West End, enjoying that delightful feeling which one cannot help entertaining on finding oneself unexpectedly one's own master.

I was not at all sorry to turn my back on the "Land-and-Water-Flash-of-Lightning Company's" offices in the City. There was something refreshing in mingling with those aristocratic streams of the West-End thoroughfares. After buying myself a pair of gloves and a new hat, I found myself in a quiet but highly-respectable street, with which I had not been previously acquainted.

Feeling slightly fatigued, I looked around for a public-house; but it appeared to me that the street in question was much too genteel to tolerate a tavern, for I could not see anything at all resembling one. I stopped, and reflected on the advisability of retracing my steps, when I saw a female standing on the threshold of a doorway; she was attired in a plain cotton dress, and had the unmistakable appearance of a domestic.

"Can you tell me what street this is?"

"Bolton Row," she replied.

"Indeed!" I continued, remembering the name, and being at once animated with my old curiosity.

"Is there anything wonderful in that?" she asked.

"Nothing much, my dear; but can you tell me where Mr. Raby lives?"

"Mr. Raby!" she repeated; "this is his house. Do you want to see him?"

I found that I had got myself into a dilemma, and was delibe-

rating as to the reply I should make, when the abigail kindly relieved me from my embarrassment by adding, "I suppose you are the new 'valley' he is waiting for? Oh, my! won't you catch it for being so much behind time!"

I must confess I was not flattered by being taken for a valet; I did not think there was much of the pampered menial about me. But the spirit of adventure, which had always been more or less rampant in my breast, was aroused, and the rash idea of representing myself as the expected servant took possession of me. Perhaps I should by so doing solve the mystery of the telegram and the advertisement; it would be an exciting, if not an agreeable way of spending my holiday.

I was not in the least afraid of being prosecuted for getting into Mr. Raby's service under false pretences, because I knew that my position in the City, and the high opinion my employers had of me, coupled with the fact that I was engaged in the compilation of a book, and wished to gather materials for it in a legitimate or illegitimate way, would at once put a stop to any prosecution of a criminal nature.

Looking earnestly at the maid-servant, I said, in a tone of deprecation, "I don't expect there'll be much row, if you go and tell master that I couldn't find the street."

"I shan't tell master nothing," she answered, with a toss of her head; "you'll have to do all that yourself."

"You are too pretty to be hard-hearted, I'm sure," I said.

"Whatever I may be, it won't do for me to be standing here," she replied.

"Just run inside, then, there's a dear, and tell the governor I've arrived, will you?"

"Well, as you're so polite——"

"You don't know me yet."

"I'll go and do what you ask. Come inside, and wait in the hall."

I entered, and the door closed behind me. With all my courage and carelessness, I could not help feeling a little nervous, and experiencing some anxiety to see my new master.

In a few minutes a tall, handsome gentleman, of about five-and-thirty years of age, came into the hall, and exclaimed—

"Oh! you are the man, I presume, that Mr. Stone has sent me. He tells me you are quite a novice, but that you are active, intelligent, and honest."

"I hope you may find me so, sir," I said, diffidently.

"I sincerely hope so too, because, if I find you worthy of it, I shall place great confidence in you."

"That you may safely do, sir."

"I suppose," continued Mr. Raby, "that you are aware that you have put me to considerable inconvenience by being so long in making your appearance here?"

"I must beg pardon, sir, but if you will allow me to explain——"

"Certainly."

"I lost the train that should have brought me to town, and being new to this locality, I could not find the street for some time."

"Very well—say no more. Have you brought your trunk with you?"

"No, sir, it will not come till to-morrow morning," I replied.

"That is unfortunate," he said, evidently slightly annoyed.

"You must manage the best way you can. I have received a telegram this morning, which necessitates my immediate departure from town; you, of course, will have to accompany me. Go I must, this afternoon; so you had better leave instructions for your traps to be forwarded to Royston, in Somersetshire, for which place we leave London this afternoon."

"Very well, sir," I replied; "I have travelled a little before now, and can make shift without much difficulty."

"Go down stairs; have your dinner, and hold yourself in readiness to start at any moment I may want you."

I made a low bow, and Mr. Raby retired and left me by myself. I then sought the lower regions, where I was hospitably received by the other servants, who hailed me as an acquisition to their small party.

From their conversation I gleaned the following facts respecting Mr. Raby. He was rich, but somewhat eccentric. His elder brother, Mark Raby, possessed vast estates in Somersetshire, in which county his principal seat was known as Royston Castle.

In that neighbourhood Ernest Raby's early days had been passed. After leaving college, he had resided for some time under his brother's roof, during which time he conceived an overwhelming passion for a lady living in the vicinity, named Adele Millman. Adele reciprocated his passion with all the fervour of an intensely amorous nature; but, to the surprise of everyone, she suddenly disappeared, and was supposed to have left the country.

Ever since her mysterious disappearance Ernest Raby had been inconsolable. He was not the same man. All his efforts to discover the slightest trace of his adored one were unsuccessful; and he subsided into a state of hopeless despondency, which was far from being allied to resignation.

Scarcely had I succeeded in gaining these particulars, when Mr. Raby's bell rang, and I had to go up-stairs.

The house was handsomely furnished, and with great taste; but everything in the apartments occupied by my master was placed in its position without the least methodical arrangement or attempt at uniformity. Mr. Raby was most untidy, and all his time seemed to be occupied by mental anxieties, which would allow him to think of nothing but his lost Adele and his absorbing sorrow.

I assisted Mr. Raby to put his things together and arrange his

wardrobe for travelling. A cab took us to the railway-station. Putting some money into my hand, he said—

“Pay the cab, Mortimer,—didn’t you say your name was Mortimer?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Ah! I thought my memory was good enough not to deceive me in so small a particular. Pay the cab, and having done so, take a couple of railway-tickets to Royston.”

“One first and one second, sir?” I asked.

He looked at me from head to foot for a time, and then replied, “As you are not in livery, and as I want to know a little more of you, take two first-class tickets,—we will travel together.”—

Touching my hat, I satisfied the demands of the cab-driver, saw the luggage placed on a truck and labelled for Royston, and then purchased a couple of first-class tickets for that town.

I found my master on the platform, turning over the leaves of some cheap volumes on a book-stall. He held in his hand a bundle of papers, which he handed to me, as soon as he perceived that I had executed the commissions with which he had entrusted me.

“Look out for a *coupè*,” he said. “Place these inside, to show that the seats are engaged, and stand outside till I come. Give the guard as much as you like, but I must have a *coupè* to smoke in.”

Money will do anything with a railway-guard, and by the judicious expenditure of a shilling I obtained what I wanted.

In a short time the train—an express—started. Mr. Raby was gloomy and preoccupied. He lighted a cigar, and glanced over the pages of an illustrated periodical, which he afterwards gave to me, according me permission to smoke if I felt so inclined; but as it was a habit in which I very seldom indulged, I refused, not wishing to be too familiar in his presence.

In half-an-hour’s time he grew tired of reading, and laying down his journal, exclaimed—

“The gentleman who recommended you, Mortimer, told me that you were highly trustworthy, therefore I shall not hesitate to place confidence in you. Most likely before the end of the week events of importance will take place.”

Here he broke off abruptly.

I waited a little while to see if he would resume his remarks, but finding he did not seem at all inclined to do so, with a view of stimulating his forgetfulness or his reticence, I said—

“You may rely upon my secrecy, sir, at all times.”

“Eh! what is that?” he cried, starting up.

I repeated my remark.

“Oh! it is you, Mortimer,” he said, in a gentler tone. “I was indulging in a day-dream, and forgot all about you. Where are we now?”

"I really don't know, sir."

"Not know!" he exclaimed, in a tone of irritation. "Don't talk such nonsense. Where is your 'Bradshaw'?"

I quickly found it amongst the rugs and books.

"Here, sir," I answered.

"Very well. You know what the time was when we left London; look at your watch, see the time now, then turn to the railway-guide, and see at or near what place we ought to be now."

Having made the calculation, I said, "Reading, sir."

"Reading. Very well. Why couldn't you have done all that without giving me the trouble of teaching you? You must be a little more independent—indeed you must; I can't bear being worried."

During the rest of the journey, he did not condescend to open his lips to me. I was not at all sorry to be left to myself, for a tyrannical master was something new to me, and I was not as yet thoroughly broken to harness.

I could picture to myself the astonishment of the real Simon Pure, on arriving at Mr. Raby's in Bolton Row, and being treated like an impostor. Although the idea was excessively amusing to me, the fact was likely to be anything but agreeable to him.

The country through which the train darted, so as to realize the poetical figure of "flying on the wings of the wind," was picturesque and pretty in the extreme.

I had never seen Somersetshire, and consequently hoped to spend my holiday as pleasantly there as anywhere else, in spite of the voluntary servitude to which I had for the time being condemned myself. On arriving at Royston, the shades of evening were falling, and it was nearly dark when a crazy, old-fashioned fly took us to a third-rate inn called the "Fish at Sea."

"I do not wish to be known down here," Mr. Raby explained to me, "and for that reason I avoid the Royston Arms and those places where I should be known immediately; and so that recognition may be difficult, if not impossible, I shall call myself Smirk; do you understand?"

"Perfectly, sir."

The "Fish at Sea" was not one of those hostelrys which recommend themselves externally to the eye of the weary traveller requiring refreshment for man, if not for beast. From the dilapidated condition of the Fish, it was fair to infer that it was a long time since it had been at sea, and that an immersion in a solution of whitewash, in the absence of a saline bath, would do it no great harm.

But the interior was comfortable and clean—two distinguishing qualities not to be despised. A dinner, which was so simple in its nature as not to try the resources of the establishment very highly, was ordered. During the meal, I waited upon Mr. Raby, afterwards getting my own dinner below stairs, where I made

acquaintance with the Boots, a gentleman of the Sam Weller description, who was jovial, with a dry humour.

Said the Boots, blandly, as if bribed by and in the interests of the landlord—

“Come to stop long, you and the guv’nor?”

“Not knowing, can’t say,” I replied, with my mouth full of curried rabbit.

“Ah! Nice part this. Touring it, I suppose?”

“Shouldn’t be surprised, though it may be business.”

“Don’t seem in the guv’nor’s confidence,” said Boots.

“Not very deep.”

“Seems a closish sort of a chap.”

“Does he?”

Seeing that though the pump was good the sucker was dry, my friend Boots desisted for a time from pumping, and turned the conversation into other and ordinary channels.

“It’s about time I shut up shop, and looked to the horses and poultry. There’s such a sight of gipsies about just now.”

“They are dangerous customers,” I remarked.

“That’s true; but they spend a sight of money at times, when they’re in luck.”

“Have you suffered much from their depredations?”

“No, I can’t say that I have,” Boots replied. “But that’s not because they haven’t tried it on. Well, I’m going to shut up. Will you come?”

“I don’t mind if I do for a minute or two. I left master with his bottle of claret, and he didn’t look like wanting me for an hour at least.”

Boots lighted a lantern, and led the way into the stable-yard. He watered the horses, made their beds, and locked the stable-door, after which he went to the hen-house, in which the fowls were at roost.

A peculiar noise made by hens when frightened in the dark struck on Boots’ ear, who, wise in his generation, guessed at the cause, and exclaimed between his teeth—

‘There’s one of those darned gips at work—bless my eyes if there ain’t! Come on, mate, and it’s odds against him.’

Following my friend closely, I assisted him materially in grasping a dark form, which like a shadow endeavoured to glide out of the yard. The dark form turned out to be a stalwart gipsy, who had three brace of dead fowls in his possession, and would have escaped scot-free if we had been a minute later.

“I’ve got you, have I?” cried Boots, holding him by the nape of the neck, and pushing him along in triumph; “I’ll teach you to steal fowls, my tulip, at the ‘Fish at Sea!’ Come on.”

Our arrival at the bar of the inn with our prisoner created no little sensation. Boots was fully occupied with his prisoner. I carried the spoil which we had so opportunely recovered.

"What's this?—what's all this, William?" exclaimed the landlord, who was a short, pompous little man.

"I've caught one o' them gips, sir—just come out of the roost, and here he is."

The gipsy begged hard to be allowed to go, but the landlord was inexorable, and would make no terms with him.

The noise of the altercation penetrated to the room in which Mr. Raby was closeted, and he came to the scene of action, desirous of finding out what the matter might be.

I observed that he started when he saw the gipsy, and I also noticed that the face of the latter, which was before clouded, cleared as a mysterious sign passed between them.

"What has this man done, landlord?" inquired Mr. Raby,

"What has he done, sir? Why, broken into my hen-roost, and stolen six of my best fowls! But he shall learn that he mustn't do such things with impunity. I'll make an example of him, and if he doesn't get six months on the 'Stepper,' it will astonish me as much as it will him!"

"What do you suppose is the amount of the damage he has inflicted upon you?" asked Mr. Raby, quietly.

"Six fowls at 3s. 6d.—how much is that, William? Just a guinea, ain't it?"

"Yes, sir, that's the figure."

"But you have the fowls," said the gipsy, "and you can sell them."

"Never mind!" exclaimed Mr. Raby. "Take this guinea, landlord, keep your fowls, and let the fellow go."

"Let him go, sir?" said the landlord, hesitatingly.

"Yes; he won't offend again."

The landlord took up the guinea which Mr. Raby had laid upon the counter, looked at it, tested it, scratched his head, and came to a final conclusion—

"You may go," he said. "I sacrifice a principle in yielding to this gentleman's request; but, as it is your first offence, you may go."

The fact was, the calculating and shrewd publican saw that he should get more by being merciful than by indulging in severity, however well-merited it might be, so inclined to clemency.

"Let me speak to the fellow," said Mr. Raby, "and I'll take care that this sort of outrage does not occur again."

They walked out together, the gentleman and the gipsy. I followed, and stood at the entrance porch. They walked up and down together in front of the door, and as they passed me, I caught fragmentary pieces of their conversation.

"Where are the tents pitched?" inquired Mr. Raby.

"About a mile south of the abbey. You know it well," replied the gipsy; "we used to call it Dead Man's Hollow!"

"Is Diana expecting me?"

"She speaks of no one else."

"And her health?"

"Is very bad. It is thought that she cannot live long."

"I suppose she sent the advertisement to London that appeared in the '*Times*' this morning?"

"That I don't know. Francisco left the encampment two days ago, after being three hours in Diana's tent."

"That is enough," replied Mr. Raby; "say not a word more. I will be at the camp to-night ere midnight strikes."

This was all that I could hear, but it was quite sufficient to stimulate my curiosity afresh.

It was about half-past ten when Mr. Raby sent for me. I found him with his hat on ready to go out; the weather was too warm for a great-coat.

"I am going out, and wish you to accompany me," he said.

"Very well, sir; I will be ready in an instant."

"Meet me at the porch. Bring some brandy with you in a flask, and a supply of cigars."

I had only to put on my hat, and my arrangements were soon made. Mr. Raby was standing in the porch with his arms folded, looking like the demonic creation of some weird German poet.

"Walk by my side," he said; "we will be equals for once—why should we not be? I may want your help; can I rely upon you?"

"As far as my life goes, sir," I replied.

"I believe you," was his laconic comment on what I had said.

After going a little way, he took my arm. I felt for him, because I thought of Adele, and the wonderful story of her sudden disappearance occupied my mind. I could fancy the misery that he suffered at that time, and of which he had been the prey ever since. Grief was stamped upon his expressive but pallid countenance.

He seemed perfectly acquainted with the road we were travelling. The stars shone in the heavens; it was a charming night—such a night, in fact, as only lovely August can produce; a crescent moon adorned the sky, and irradiated the earth with its gleams of silver.

After walking about two miles, we arrived in sight of a magnificent castle. It stood out boldly in the moonlight; its towers and battlements were distinctly visible.

"Look!" cried Mr. Raby, "that is my ancestral home—there my brother Mark lives."

"Are you unfriendly, sir?" I asked.

"Unfriendly!—no; he loves me as I love him; but this neighbourhood is so full of hateful recollections, that I cannot live in it."

"Do you speak of Adele, sir?"

"Adele!—how came you to hear that name? Speak!" he shouted, releasing my arm from his grasp, and confronting me with flashing eyes.

"From your domestics at——"

"Oh, yes—I understand; I suppose you have heard the story, as well as the rest of them."

Turning abruptly to the left, we skirted some woodland, and after a brisk walk, reached a gipsy encampment.

"Keep close to me," said Mr. Raby.

I did so. In a few moments the gipsy who was released from custody by Mr. Raby's intercession came up to us, and asked him to follow.

"Are you afraid of violence, sir?" I asked in a low tone, inaudible to the gipsy, and only just so to the person to whom it was addressed.

"Oh dear, no," he replied, with a smile; "this is not my first appearance amongst the Children of the Moon, by a great many."

He called them the "Children of the Moon:" that was an additional link in the chain which was to render intelligible the mysterious advertisement in the paper.

It gradually became clear to me that a gipsy named Diana was desirous of imparting a secret to Mr. Raby which he would give the world to know,—perhaps it related to his long-lost Adele!

My heart pulsed more quickly as this idea occurred to me. I was becoming terribly excited; the fresh country air and the novelty of all that I had during the day come in contact with, raised my spirits, and I anxiously awaited the sequel.

We were conducted to a tent, which was made in the shape of a segment of a circle. It was placed under a tree, whose leafy branches afforded it protection from the falling dew.

The gipsies living in the encampment were all asleep; they rose with the lark, and having nothing to do in the evening (except stealing), generally retired to rest early.

Diana, the queen of the tribe, was reclining on a bed of moss and fern-leaves. Our conductor pulled aside the coarse canvas covering which shut out the cold air from the entrance, and announced Mr. Raby.

The gipsy was on her feet in a moment; but, from the way in which she tottered, it was very evident that she was far from strong or well.

"You have come!" she exclaimed, addressing Mr. Raby; "you have come, in obedience to my published request; and thank your God that you have come in time!"

"What do you mean, Diana?" inquired Mr. Raby.

"You shall hear, when Belshazzar and the man with you have retired."

Belshazzar went away, but I lingered.

"Why stays he?" asked the gipsy.

"Because he is my friend, and it is my pleasure that he should stay."

"Have your way," she answered petulantly, "have your way; I

don't know that it makes much difference to me. Come nearer, Ernest Raby—I want ye nearer to me.”

He approached, and stood by her side. She leant her arm upon his shoulder. By the faint light which prevailed, I was enabled to observe her form and features minutely. She was about Mr. Raby's age, but frightfully emaciated; she appeared to have suffered even more acutely than he had. At one time she must have been supereminently good-looking.

The embers of a dying fire flickered now and then into a fitful glare without the tent, adding to the weird and mystic aspect of the scene, which was heightened by the “witching hour of night.”

“Ernest,” said the gipsy, “it is many years since you first taught me to love you.”

“It would have been better had we never met,” said Mr. Raby, bitterly.

“True—very true; but the past cannot be recalled. You deserted me because a new sun arose on your horizon; but she vanished almost as soon as she arose.”

“That I know. If you did not mean to tell me something new, why did you bring me here?”

“You shall hear something new. I like to see your agony of impatience,” replied Diana, finding pleasure in a cruel joy. “I am like a cat with a mouse, but I differ from the cat in one respect.”

“And that is——”

“I do not mean finally to annihilate you. I am brought to death's door by my sufferings, and finding that I cannot live long, I have determined to be magnanimous, in the hope of making my peace with Heaven. You remember Adele?”

“Do you want to madden me?” cried Mr. Raby, becoming fearfully excited.

“I have wished to madden you, Ernest Raby; I have wished to see you lying dead at my feet, but that feeling has now passed away. I want to make reparation and atonement. The workings of the human heart are mysterious, and little intelligible to those whose lives have been uneventful.”

“Tell me of Adele,” sighed Mr. Raby.

“I will. Having commenced my work of atonement, it does not become me to falter half-way.”

“Is—is she dead?”

Diana looked pityingly upon him.

“That is all I ask. Tell me—tell me!”

“*She lives!*” cried Diana, after a pause.

Mr. Raby, distracted with emotion and hardly master of himself, fell upon his knees, and kissing the gipsy's hand, beseeched her to tell him more.

“This—all this is for a rival! Oh! only the fear and the near approach of death could induce me to make so great a sacrifice!” said Diana, in a low tone.

Again Mr. Raby conjured her to proceed with her communication.

"It is many years ago since I loved you," said she, "but I can remember well how you left me for Adele Millman; my only consolation for that agonizing reflection is that I have enjoyed just as many years of revenge."

"Revenge!" he echoed, in a stony voice.

"Yes—revenge! Adele is alive, but she has languished in a dungeon ever since you dared to love her."

"Adele!—a dungeon! Oh, my God!" ejaculated Mr. Raby, springing to his feet, and looking wildly around him.

"And I alone can liberate her. If I were to die to-night, the secret would die with me, and Adele would never see the light of day again, but would perish miserably."

This declaration proved to Mr. Raby how completely he was in the power of the terrible woman before him. If she chose to carry her secret to the grave with her, he would have no chance whatever of recovering his much-loved Adele. He was prostrated with fear and expectation.

At length Diana rose in her might, and said, "Come, come with me; you shall in an hour's time clasp Adele in your arms. I shall not witness your meeting, for I shall die before the sun rises."

"Die!"

"Yes. I have a prophetic soul within me, and I know that I shall never see another daybreak."

She led the way out of the tent, but scarcely had she reached the open space in front than she fell down upon the bruised grass. Blood streamed from her lips, and she gasped painfully for breath.

"Help! help!" I shouted.

Belshazzar was by our side immediately. My cries aroused the tribe, who flocked in numbers round us, fantastically attired, and bent curious regards upon us.

Mr. Raby sank upon his knees beside the dying gipsy. He placed his ear to her mouth, and drank in her last words with the utmost eagerness.

This was what she said:—

"In my pocket you will find a key; take it, and go to the old chapel in the South Close. The key will open a door in the wall which is covered with ivy; that door leads into a subterranean passage, which conducts to a chain of vaults only known to myself and the shades of those who once owned Royston Castle."

Here she found it so difficult to breathe, that her words were scarcely audible.

"Go on—go on! For Heaven's sake, do not stop now!" exclaimed Mr. Raby, glueing his ear to her lips.

"In vault—find—Adele!" murmured Diana, whose spirit was fast flitting to another sphere.

"She dies! she dies!" cried Belshazzar.

The gipsy's head fell back, her eyes closed, and in another moment she was a corpse.

Mr. Raby beckoned Belshazzar to him, and related the gipsy's dying words, begging him to find the key of which she had spoken. He searched, and found it.

A consultation then ensued between Mr. Raby, Belshazzar, and myself, while the body was taken into the tent by the relatives of the deceased. It was decided that we should start directly for the old chapel, in order to test the truth of the gipsy's words and liberate Adele, if it should prove that she was confined in the noisome vaults of which Diana had in her last moments spoke.

Provided with lanterns, and armed with bludgeons to keep away the rats and other vermin we expected to meet with, we started. It was but a short walk from the camp, and after some search amongst the ivy, we found a stone door, which the key belonging to Diana opened.

Mr. Raby, holding a lantern on high, led the way, followed by myself and Belshazzar; he was a stranger to superstition, and knew no fear. A flight of sixteen steps led us to a passage, which we traversed. We discovered a number of cells, corresponding to the number of steps, so that these dismal dungeons could, in the days of priestcraft and baronial intolerance, have contained at least sixteen victims.

"Adele! Adele!"

It was Ernest Raby's voice which rang out shrilly as a clarion.

There was a faint responsive cry in the immediate vicinity. In another moment a door was dashed backward, and a man held a woman in his clasped embrace.

Strangely wild and savage was her appearance. She had been for long, long years deprived of the benefits of civilization. Her hair was tangled and hanging down her back; her—but we will not dilate on her prolonged misery and her accumulated sufferings.

Suffice it to say, that she was conveyed to the outer air, and that she forgot the wretched past in the deliciously happy future.

The wicked designs of a jealous and slighted woman triumphed for a time, but it pleased Providence in the end to confound them.

Mr. Raby married Adele, who had been carried off and shut up in those dismal vaults by Diana's malice, and who could hardly believe in the transition from misery to joy.

I had little difficulty in making my peace with Mr. Raby for the deception I had practised upon him, and was able afterwards to congratulate myself upon having added another Telegraph Secret to my already numerous list.

THE END.

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